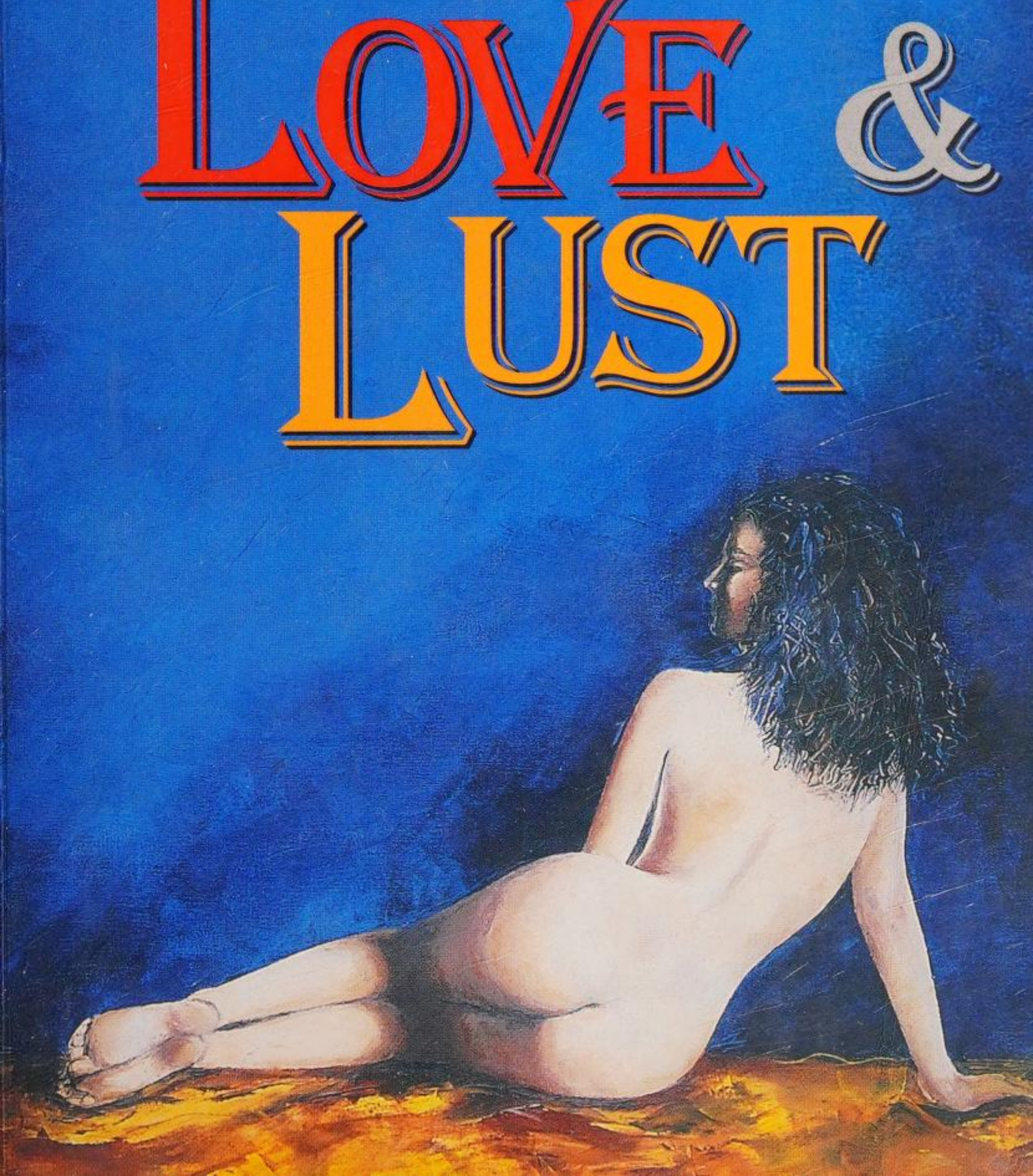
# KHUSHWANT SINGH

ON

# WOMEN, LOVE & LUST



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KHUSHWANT SINGH (87) is much the most widely recognised author in India today. His weekly columns are reproduced by over 50 journals in all the regional languages of the country. He has done different things at different times: practised law, diplomacy and politics; taught comparative religion at Princeton and Swarthmore and edited *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and *The Hindustan Times*. He has written regularly for several European and American journals including *The New York Times*. He has also edited and translated a number of literary works.

Author of 88 books, Khushwant Singh is best known for his work of fiction, *Train to Pakistan* and his *History of the Sikhs*. The chief causes of his immense popularity are his acerbic pen, his wit and humour and most of all, his ability to laugh at himself.

He was Member of Parliament from 1980 to 1986. Among other honours he was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974 by the President of India (he returned the decoration in 1984 in protest against the Union Government's siege of the Golden Temple, Amritsar).

He lives in New Delhi.

A graduate of the Sophia College, Mumbai, ILLOOSH is a fine artist whose primary medium is oil on canvas with a palette knife. She has held several successful art shows in Delhi, where she lives with her husband and two daughters.

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Compiled by
**N. Krishnamurthy**



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This collection of articles are
dedicated to the memory of my wife,
Kaval
who died on the morning of December 28, 2001

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# *Introduction*

I am now 87 years old with almost 100 book titles to my name. I have no great opinions of myself as a writer and am often assured by my publishers that I have good reasons to regard myself as a second-rater. A somewhat peevish editor of one of India's leading daily newspapers once told me "You have made bullshit into 'an art form'." Evidently people like to read bullshit. Though I am often described as a dirty old man, a drunkard and a womaniser, I have quite a few readers. I am reminded of lines by Hilaire Belloc:

*When I am dead, I hope it may be said:*
*'His sins were scarlet, but his books were read.'*

My books may not sell like proverbial hot cakes but they do cater to the tastes of those who like to read spicy hot stuff like they relish *bhel-puri* on the sands of Chowpatty beach. I feel amply rewarded to know that once a while I bring a smile on my readers' faces.

These articles and essays were written for different magazines over almost half a century. I had all but forgotten

about them as I kept no records of them. I owe a debt of gratitude to readers like Krishnamurthy who took pains to keep clippings and made them available to publishers. The readers will find a lot of repetitive views and quotations which may irritate them; I tender my sincere apologies to them.

— Khushwant Singh

# WOMEN

# *Women's Lib*

Men have behaved abominably towards women. The record of Christian Europe is much worse than that of Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu or Pagan Asia and Africa. In two centuries eight million women condemned by the Church as witches were burned at the stake in Europe. Indians, though they did not go to the extent of killing women who dared to be different, brutalised them in so savage a manner as to drive them to take their own lives. If statistics of women's suicide were compiled, I have little doubt that India would top the list.

We in India have gone a long way in atoning for the sins of our fathers. We have given women equal rights in matters of property, political participation, marriage and divorce. (Only the Muslims, of their own volition, have chosen to lag behind.) But rights conferred by law are rarely availed of and discrimination in practice continues as before. In this, the International Women's Year, let us deliberate on the full implications of giving equality to their sex—because difference of sex is the root cause of inequality.

As long as women have to discharge the biological

function assigned to them, they will never be equal to men. It is they who menstruate, conceive, bear and nurse children. These processes incapacitate them for long periods and make them dependable on men—father or brother, husband or lover or son. Since human infants take much longer to grow up than animals, the mother-children dependency on the male provider usually lasts the entire lifetime of the *woman.*

No division of labour (man the breadwinner, woman the housekeeper) can conceal the fact that man is the master, woman his mistress and servitor. Shulamith Firestone, leading philosopher of women's *lib* in America, puts it tersely in her *The Dealectic of Sex* (Vikas): "Just as to assure elimination of economic classes requires the revolt of the underclass (proletariat) and the seizure of the means of production... to ensure the elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and seizure of control of *reproduction:* not only the full restoration to women of ownership of their own bodies, but also their temporary seizure of control of human fertility... the reproduction of the species by one sex for the benefit of both would be replaced by artificial reproduction; children would be born to both sexes equally or independently of either; the dependence of the child on the mother would give way to a greatly shortened dependence on a small group of others." And so on.

Another argument to prove male superiority is that all the great works of art, literature and science were created by men, not women. True! But then women were never relieved of the burden of child-bearing, child-husband-home caring to get a fair chance to prove their worth. Men

have created the myth of love and romance to keep women in bondage. The love they practise is different from the one they preach and expect from their women.

Says Mrs. Firestone: "Men are interested in nothing but a screw (wham, bam, thank you, ma'am)... and once sure of their woman, they become philanderers." The worst tragedy befalls the "mod" lass who deludes herself that by ridding herself of feminine "hang-ups" and becoming a "groovy chick", indulging freely in sex, she is striking a blow for women's equality. All she succeeds in achieving is being slept around with and being discarded as a slut for a more "reputable" woman.

It would appear that the only chance of women getting equal rights is to enjoy sex but refuse to bear children, to let all children be born in test-tubes and be cared for equally by men and women. The day is not far off.

— *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, March, 1975

# *Women Demand Their Birthright*

The six thousand women and men who foregathered in Mexico City last month for the International Women's Year Conference could be divided into two categories: those who came in their own right because of their involvement in movements for women's emancipation, and those who came through the bedrooms of Presidents, Prime Ministers and eminent politicians. Those who came in their own right were more numerous and did the real work. Those who came through their husbands' bedrooms made the speeches written for them but stole the limelight.

The chief figures in the ranks of the deserving invitees were Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Ashraf Pahlevi of Iran, Mother Teresa, Gloria Steinem, Betty Frieden, Germaine Greer, Kate Millet, Angela Davis, Jane Fonda, Valentina Tereshkova (the Soviet cosmonaut) and Vilma Espir (the Cuban guerilla fighter). There were also a number of African and Latin American ministers and lady diplomats in this category.

All the Indians were deserving participants. Prabha Rao (40), M.A., Minister for Education, Maharashtra, was the leader. With her were Parvathi Krishnan (*nee*

Kumaramangalam) and Margaret Alva (Members of Parliament), Sakina Hassan of Aligarh University, Shyamala Pappu (Advocate, Supreme Court), Soonu Kochar of the Council of Cultural Relations, and the vivacious Padma Ramachandran of the I.A.S. who acted as Secretary. Two men were attached to the delegation: P.N. Luthra, Secretary of the Department of Social Welfare, who was the think-tank and Srinivasan from our UN office in New York.

The bed-hoppers made the headlines but little else. Why Jehan Sadat for Egypt or Nusrat Bhutto for Pakistan or Imelda Marcos for the Philippines? Why the wives of Prime Ministers of Guyana or Jamaica? And why Leah Rabin and not Golda Meir for Israel? Even the American delegation had the wife of Senator Jacob Javits as an adviser when her chief qualification was cohabitation with Sake. The point was of more than academic importance. Of the three items to be discussed one was the role of women in maintaining peace. Since these women did not speak independently but echoed the prejudices of their husbands, they made no womanly contribution to peace.

This was abundantly proved by two incidents that took place on the first day. Jehan Sadat was asked whether she would talk to Leah Rabin. She replied with a blunt "No" and used words which her husband would have had he been asked to meet the Prime Minister of Israel. The other concerned Pakistan and India. Begum Nusrat Bhutto had hoped to be among the elite to address a full house. But the inauguration had been a tiresomely long *tamasha* with tedious speeches by President Luis Echeverria of Mexico, Kurt Waldheim, Helvi Sipila, Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Imelda Marcos.

When the plenary was reconvened after lunch, the attendance was very thin. Begum Bhutto refused to speak and asked for another time. She was billed to take the rostrum after the tea break. The attendance was even thinner. At the insistence of the Pakistani delegation a special after-dinner session was convened and an unofficial whip sent round the delegation to provide an audience for the wife of the Prime Minister of Pakistan. By then the Indian delegation had got wind that Begum Bhutto was going to needle India.

Finally when the Begum Sahiba mounted the rostrum to unburden herself of the speech prepared for her by the Pakistani Ministry of External Affairs, she found herself facing the Indian contingent in full force. As far as the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent are concerned, changes in the sexes of the leaders will do little to defuse the tensions that exist.

Indians usually make a good showing at conferences. They have sharp minds, a love for logic-chopping and the gift of the gab. They are at their best in wording resolutions, proposing amendments and lobbying. It is only when the time comes for action that they run out of enthusiasm.

Our delegation had obviously done its homework. Unlike most other nations, we had had a commission to examine the status of women and were equipped with its findings. "We have our facts and figures at our finger-tips," said Luthra. "We know what we are up against and will tackle our problems with a sense of reality." All of the first day and most of the night Luthra and Parvathi Krishnan were busy on the speech that Prabha Rao was to deliver.

What Prabha Rao said may not at first reading sound

very revolutionary. But if you read it carefully you will notice that on all the three objectives, *viz.* Equality, Integration and Peace, she said something which had not been said before.

*On Equality*. India like many other countries has passed legislation giving women equal rights but, in actual fact, we do not have it because of two reasons. One: that from the time of birth different activities are marked out for boys and girls and inequality gets entrenched in our conscience from childhood. That instead of male-female confrontation there should be co-partnership between the sexes. Second: that the imperative need was to bring about a change in men's thinking. In actual fact International Women's Year is truly an occasion for men to change their traditional pattern of thinking.

*On Integration*. The induction of women at every level and every stage of our development programmes.

*On Peace*. The Indian argument was not strictly factual about women suffering more in war than men nor in asserting that "woman, by nature, is pacifist".

It was inevitable that attitudes of advanced nations towards the emancipation of women would be different from those of the lesser developed and more tradition-bound societies. At one extreme were the American militants of the Women's Lib burning their bras, abolishing nomenclatures like Mr and Mrs, addressing the presiding officer as "chair person", etc, and at the other are countries like Saudi Arabia which refused to send a delegation and stuck to their own version of the sacred laws which sanction polygamy and require women to live in veiled segregation.

It was pointed out by an African delegate that women have rights which they often misuse. He gave an amusing instance from the Cameroons where schools are up against a real problem because women teachers arrange to become pregnant in time to demand maternity leave immediately after the three-month vacations—thus taking a half-year holiday on full pay.

Gloria Steinem squashed such arguments as relics of the past. If a man can get years of military leave, why can't a woman get some months of maternity leave when she alone is saddled with the task of bringing up the children? Why reward people for training to take life and not for giving life? Bearing a child is a job she is already doing free of charge, why burden her with more?

'Women's Journals—Shopping Lists'

Gloria Steinem also had a dig at women's journals which instead of rousing women's conscience against injustices meted out to them continue to be catalogues of things they can buy and achieve little more than stimulate consumerism. She handed me a copy of her magazine *Ms* dedicated to 1975 with the banner headline "It Is Your Year". *Ms* has no ads of textiles, cosmetics or other beauty aids or recipes to reduce weight, menstrual problems, etc., which form the staple diet of women's journals. But it has its quota of erotics in pictures—and articles by Bernadette Devlin, Kate Millet and of course Gloria Steinem. She inscribed the journal with the barbed inscription. "To Mr Singh who will change his opinion about women."

Has the conference in Mexico succeeded in its object

of rousing the conscience of mankind against injustices done to women? Hardly. The media took little notice of it. The speeches were tedious, repetitive and added nothing new to our information on the subject. It was also a "paternalistic affair" where though men were few, the male ethos *machismo* pervaded. And too many of the eminent delegates were *wifeypoos* who had no business to be there. The women also quarrelled amongst themselves. Gloria Steinem was condemned by a radical group as a "C.I.A. agent". One lot screamed at another—"bring out your *chicanos"* (little girls).

All said and done, conferences achieve little beyond pious resolutions. It is now for the different countries to implement the resolutions that will carry forward the revolution and then the "last colony left to the male imperialists"—as Princess Ashraf Pahlevi said, can be liberated.

"We will win. We are more than half the population of the world," said a lady from Nigeria. "*Insha Allah*!"

— *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, July, 1975

# *Shrimati India*

We were in the *Pasha* discussing the possibility of drawing up a gourmet menu consisting of the tastiest dishes from different parts of India which the patronne, Nargis Oomerbhoy has made her speciality; she personally supervises every detail in the kitchen of her restaurant.

From food the conversation drifted to women: how to manufacture Shrimati India by combining the best of the features of the beauties of our land. "For complexion, nothing to touch a Kashmiri," exclaimed a Kashmiri. "She is fair but not as white as the European: she's more like old ivory than raw ham. Also has beautiful eyes: almond-shaped and as large as a gazelle's. They can be as blue as the sky in autumn; they can be as dark as the limpid pools of Heshbon."

"You Northern Indians have more colour prejudice than South African Boers. All you want of your women is that they be fair—the whiter the better. Give me the smooth ebony black of an Adivasi: Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Muria or Bhil—all have lovely skins. And what figures; bosoms that never sag, rounded buttocks that never become the

shapeless mass of flesh your city women carry around." After some debate on old ivory versus ebony, we conceded that the Adivasi ladies have a figurative edge over their Dravidian and Aryan sisters.

Someone entered a plea for the lasses of Himachal and Rajasthan. "They are neither too fair nor too dark. They are neither as large as the Kashmiri, the Punjabi or the Jats of Uttar Pradesh or Haryana; nor as small as the Maharashtrians, the Gujaratis or the ladies from the South. Modest-sized bosoms, slender waists and bashful eyes." His remarks stung the Haryanvi. "The women of Haryana have all that in larger and healthier proportions. They are the only ones who know how to bear themselves like queens. See them stride along: ram-rod straight, flouncing their long skirts: Wah! Wah!"

"What is a woman without beautiful hair? And no women have hair like the Bengalis: raven-black and always long enough for them to sit on," said the Bengali. "They also have the most melodious voices. A woman may look like a swan but, if she has a harsh voice, she is no better than a crow. Our Bengal can produce a thousand Lata Mangeshkars."

"Too much *Jabakusam,"* retorted a Wog with disdain. "All Indian women put too much oil, butter or ghee in their hair. Somebody should tell them it doesn't do any good. What is the use of hair if you cannot run your fingers through them?"

"We are going off the subject," remarked a Tamilian. "The classic Indian beauty is the Southern belle. Long hair, perfectly shaped eyes and with much more animation in them. Also full bosoms, slender waists, large hips and the

smoothest skins in the world. That is why they are the only ones that can do the Bharata Natyam. When a Dravidian beauty walks, you can hear the tinkle of ankle-bells."

"What about the Maharashtrians? They are the cleanest-looking of any: always appearing as if they've just had a bath. For me cleanliness is next to godliness."

"Looks do not matter as much as manner of speech and sophistication" pronounced a roue. "And for that, it has to be a UP Muslim or a Bombay Bawaji. You notice both the influences in Indira Gandhi. She speaks like a cultured Lucknavi Begum, she has the manners of a Europeanised Parsi and bears herself like Sultana Razia."

So the composite Indian woman was evolved: Kashmiri complexion, Bengali hair and voice. Adivasi bosoms, Haryanvi gait, Maharashtrian cleanliness, South Indian figure, Punjabi animation, Hyderabadi coyness, Lucknavi speech and bearing and Parsi sophistication. Then we proceeded to invest Shrimati India with traditional qualities: In work an ayah; in the kitchen a cook; in business a bania; in bed a courtesan. If you have them all in one person, you do not have to be polygamous—you have a one-woman harem.

— *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, March, 1975

# *The Female Breast*

What is it about a woman that most men fall for? Is it her face or figure? Her eyes or lips? Her bosoms, broad hips or her posterior? An anatomical dissection would be futile because it is the totality of her physical makeup ("all her body is pasture to mine eyes") plus other intangibles like her temperament, sauciness, and above all her vitality that determine her attractive potential for the male. However it has also to be conceded that when it comes to what is vulgarly known as sex appeal it is the bosom, the middle or the buttocks that rouse the male libido. Of these three items the pornographer and the voyeur will vote for the pudenda or the rear; the aesthete be he poet, painter or a man of letters, will vote for the bosom. No part of the female anatomy has been more exploited by artists and photographers nor more written about by novelists.

Alan Brien has long been my favourite journalist-author. Ever since the *Times* group of papers including the *Sunday Times* ceased publication, the two items I have missed most are the cross-word puzzle and Alan Brien. I was glad to learn that he has been profitably engaged in field work

on the female breast or what in scientific terminology is known as mammarology. Apparently his wife Jill Tweedie approved of the project. "I have never attacked soft porn," retorted Jill to the insinuation that the two were separating after her husband's "boobing" for the sake of money.

"The interesting thing about breasts is that they change all the time" writes Alan Brien. When a woman is running, or angry, or wearing a sweater, a breast is the most restless thing in the world. But when it comes to penning variations to the theme Alan does not show much ingenuity. He describes them as others before him have done, borrowing vocabulary from architecture (domes, igloos, arches) or from the gourmet (apples, peaches, etc.)

*The Song of Solomon* compared the breasts to "two young roes that are twins". We Indians are familiar with comparisons of bosoms with melons and mangoes. We also have allusions to their restlessness: a popular Punjabi folk song sings of them as *jangli kabootar*—wild pigeons. They have been endowed with an autonomous existence of their own; an otherwise shy, docile damsel may be possessed as an 18th century English poet wrote of "a rugged bosom that beauty cannot tame".

Male preference for a well stacked bosomy female is prehistoric. Figurines of goddesses with three breasts predate the Indus valley civilization. Even later when women shed the third breast, the sizes of the two that remained where of vital interest to the male. A woman poorly endowed with was always regarded a liability. In the Old Testament brothers lamented "we have a little sister and she hath no breasts". Charles Dickens' approach was that of an exhausted old man: for him the ideal breasts were

those on which a man could repose, i.e., like *go takia.* For the more youthful the preference would be for the more shapely "on which a man could hang jewels".

I can understand bosoms being likened to domes or fowl or fruit which they resemble but find it less comprehensible when they are described as edibles. A child may have good reason to call them "honey pots" but it sounds odd when old Spenser addresses his lady love's adornments as if he were saying grace before supper:

> 'Was it a dream, or did I see plain?
> A goodly table of pure ivory,
> All spread with junkets, fit to entertain
> The greatest prince with pompous royalty:
> 'Mongst which, there in a silver dish did lie
> Two golden apples of unvalued price.'

In another of the *Amoretti* the praise is largely floral:

> 'Her goodly Bosom, like a strawberry bed;
> Her neck, like a bunch of columbines
> Her breast, like lilies, ere their leaves be shed;
> Her nipples like young blossomed jasmines.'

On erotica my personal preference is for the bawdier form of literature like the limerick. To wit:

> "To his bride the keen-eyed detective,
> "Can it be that my eye-sight's defective?
> Has the east tit the least bit
> The best of the west tit
> Or is it faulty perspective?'"

— *New Delhi,* July 1979

# *When Can a Girl say Yes?*

Not before she is sixteen, says the law. But more and more girls are saying yes much earlier. Fifteen years ago only two out of a hundred English girls admitted having sex before they were sixteen; today this figure is seven times higher. And the number of teenage pregnancies has reached proportions alarming enough to induce the British government to appoint a working committee to re-examine the whole issue.

The report, *Pregnant at School,* recommends that the 100 year old law making carnal knowledge of a girl under sixteen a serious criminal offence should be scrapped. When enacted in 1885 it was designed to protect teenage girls who worked as domestics.

The law on the subject is the same in India where it makes even less sense. For one, notwithstanding the Sarda Act, a large proportion of girls, are married off before they are sixteen. Presumably their husband are not charged with having carnal knowledge but if they stray from the matrimonial bed they may bring on their lovers' heads

criminal charges of both, adultery and sex with a girl legally not old enough to say yes.

Having said all that, I am not sure how the law should be amended. Clearly young girls should be protected from seducers. Equally clearly nymphets who play the seductress have no right to such protection whatever be their age. And more important than harshly punishing those who succumb to sex at an age when sexual impulses can be uncontrollably explosive, is to protect them against the consequences by providing sex education to children before they attain puberty.

— *New Delhi,* October 1979

# *Female Porn*

It is as rare to find a man who does not enjoy pornography and dirty jokes as it is to find a woman who does. Blue films, girlie magazines, voyeurism, writing graffiti on lavatory walls and recounting risque after-dinner anecdotes are almost an entirely masculine phenomenon. When Beatrice Faust posed the question, "If women are going to have equality with men, why not have pornography for women?" she admits that she was confronted with "many kinds of silence" from her female audience. Women are simply not turned on by pornography; "their engines are similar (to those of men) but the starter-motors are very different." Why?

Beatrice Faust has analysed this curious difference in the male and female approach to porn in an engaging thesis, *Women: Sex and Pornography* (Pelican). The plain and simple answer is biological: women's chromosomes are different from men's and that makes them less prone to dreaming about sex and more choosy about the men they fall for. Men do not need much stimuli to be turned on, they can engage in sex with almost any woman regardless

of mental or emotional appeal, whereas women, though capable of having sex with any man will only be roused by men they find attractive. Men respond to images, notions, dirty stories, women to sweet murmurings and the gentle touch. Hence the jingle:

Higamous hogamous,
Woman's monogamous,
Hogamous higamous,
Man is polygamous.

According to Ms Faust women wish to be loved in the manner they make love to their babies. Men, on the other hand, "enjoy sex so much and need intimacy so little that they cannot understand why a woman should quibble about such trivia as where, when and with whom she makes love. "Hence the conclusion summed up the saying: "Marriage is the price men pay for sex, sex is the price women pay for marriage." Despite women's lib, it remains a man's world with a manmade four-point programme of four 'A's prescribed for women: they must accept their men, adapt to them, admire them to boost their egos and appreciate them as bread-winners. We are back to square one.

— *Sunday*, March, 1983

# *Thoughts on Marriage*

I saw a film showing how marriages are arranged between eligible members of the Unification Church. Candidates were assembled in a large hall. Reverend Sun Myong Moon stood on a platform and beckoned them in turns in somewhat the following manner. "You there in the red necktie! Come up." A white American in a red necktie walked up to the dais. Reverend Moon then took a good look at the girls and spotted one: "You there, you are Japanese aren't you? Come up. You two will get married."

So they were. English boy to Chinese girl, Australian girl to Korean boy, Honduran boy to Canadian girl, Indian girl to American boy. Many of them had never seen their spouses before, no one said, "No, not this one, can I have that one instead?" No one had so much as murmured that they were in love with somebody and invoked the messiah's blessings for their union.

The choice of spouses was left entirely to him and his injunction against consummating the union for three years accepted without demur. When I suggested to one of the newly married girls that she could do a little cheating on the side, she was not amused.

I know of a Delhi businessman who advertised for a wife in the papers. Since he had mentioned his large income, the size of his bungalow and the three cars he owned, he received over a thousand applications. The man and his mother took many days to go through the correspondence and short-listed the applicants to a dozen. They were asked to appear one morning to be interviewed. Twelve girls dressed in their best saries and jewellery accompanied by their parents were seated in the verandah of the bungalow. One after another the girls and their parents were ushered into an air-conditioned office, offered cold drinks and cross-examined by the businessman and his mother. Ultimately one was selected and the details of marriage settled with her parents. Others were sent off without any apology for having been subjected to humiliation.

I know of yet another family, somewhat impoverished but still very princely in its pretensions The father had corresponded with another princely family for a match for the eldest of his five daughters. The two families met for coffee in a Delhi restaurant. The young princeling eyed all the five sisters and decided that he preferred the second girl to the eldest. He got the girl of his choice. The hurt that this experience must have caused the eldest daughter did not bother anyone.

I related these incidents to two nubile Indian lasses in the marriage market. Both are graduates, earning their own livelihood, attractive and much sought after by young men. Neither of them showed much surprise. "It's not very different in our families," said one. "Our parents arrange our marriages. It is usually after the boy has agreed and everything has been settled that they ask their daughters,

*Pasand aaya* (Do you like him)'? I have never heard anyone reply, *Nahin* (no)," The other girl who is living on her own said, "What difference does it make whether a girl marries someone of her own choice or lets her parents or friends choose a man for her? For her it is like the toss of a coin: heads she loses, tails he wins."

It reminded me of the Spanish proverb: "Marriages are like watermelons, in every hundred you will find one good one." Where does love come in? Apparently nowhere. "Marriage was a woman's invention — a method of obtaining protection for the weaker human by the stronger one" writes Barbara Cartland. "With it Eve made the consummation of love a sacrament as well as a partnership and she created a spiritual aim for requited love in the midst of an essentially physical activity. In fact, she invented the formula 'sex plus love'. This, Cartland admits, reduces marriage to absolute boredom... having made a nuptial bed, a married couple must continue to make pretence of lying on it, and not on anyone else's. This has never worked well." No doubt when they make love on their wedding night it will seem unbelievably wonderful that they will lie side by side for more than 18,000 nights. It remains to be seen whether the thrill lasts when 10,000 or so of those nights have been spent."

The ancient Greek poet, Palladus, must have had this tedium of marriage in mind when he wrote: "Marriage brings a man only two happy days,

The day he takes his bride to bed and the day

He lays her in her grave."

— *Sunday*, August, 1983

# *When a Woman bares her Soul*

The most rewarding aspect of retirement is freedom regained: do what you like with all the time in the world to do it in. Since I can do little beside reading and scribbling, I am able to churn out reams of unreadable stuff and read a novel a day. At that pace very little remains in the head. I find myself reading a novel I had read six months before and only realising after I am half through the second reading that there was something vaguely familiar about it. It shows the kind of stuff modern fiction is made of as well as the softening process of my brain. However, there are some living authors who never let me down. Amongst the most readable is the Australian, Morris West. I had read three of his novels — *The Devil's Advocate, The Shoes of the Fisherman* and *The Ambassador* before I lost track of him. Last week the post brought his latest work, *The World is Made of Glass.* For once we have evidence of good taste developing among the reading masses because this superb novel is also the current best-seller. I will not ruin your pleasure by telling you what it is about and let you savour it yourself. I will only quote a passage

which made me pause in the reading and ponder over it for quite some time. It reads: "When a woman bares her soul to you, she is much more dangerous than when she simply slips off her blouse and skirt. The ones you reject spread scandal. The ones to whom you yield so much as a gesture of affection become as voracious as maenads (wild women). So, you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. And your wife compounds the problem by turning away from you in bed and covering her sex with her hand like a Botticelli virgin."

Morris West ascribes this sentiment to the famous Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung who while giving his wife a clutch of little Jungs is also in love with and bedding his lady assistant. I am sure both West and Jung are wrong in holding that a prolonged extramarital love affair is any more dangerous than a one night stand. On the contrary while true love imposes a code of extra-marital ethics on the parties involved not to hurt feelings of cuckolded husbands and innocent wives, no such consideration exists amongst people who simply unzip their flies or for ladies who let down their skirts and blouses in a chance encounter. It is quite a different matter that while an extramarital love affair is likely to destroy marriage, an occasional slip may be forgiven to keep the family intact. In either case there is no difference between a woman baring her soul to her lover and a man baring his to his beloved.

— *Sunday*, March, 1984

# *Eyes*

We were in the lounge of a hotel in Goa waiting for the weather to clear up. Outside, the rain was coming down in torrents without a sign of clouds lifting anywhere. There was nothing to do except sit and gossip. Inevitably the conversation turned to women. As they say *Saavan-Bhadon* is the *badmaash mausam* — the amorous season. During this *mausam,* if you can't do (we were men in our seventies), you talk about doing. "What, in your opinion, is the single most important item in a woman's beauty?" they asked me as if I was an expert on the subject. Without hesitation I replied, "As far as I am concerned, it is her eyes." I tossed in a remark I had read somewhere made by an Englishman about a woman telling her lover, "I would like to drown you in my eyes." What exactly did she mean?

A woman's eyes, when blue, are often compared to the ocean; when black, to the waters of an inland lake. In the *Song of Songs* they are likened to "the pools in Heshbon" (oddly enough, also to "doves beside brooks of water"). Dante Gabriel Rossetti in *The Blessed Damozel* had similar notions:

The blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of heaven;
Her eyes weer deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even.

To the best of my knowledge, Indian poets never used oceans or lakes as similes for women's eyes. Sanskritists used flowers or animals to describe their beauty: *Kamal Naini* (lotus-eyed) or *Mrig-naini* (doe-eyed). Persian and Urdu poets also lauded them as *chashm-e-aahoo* (gazelle-eyed) or *nargisee* (like the narcissus). Both Hindi and Urdu poets praise the pink-eyed, (I have never seen one) of one as if drunk: *mast* or *sharaabi.*

The first communication between lovers usually comes through the eyes. Cervantes called them "the silent tongues of love." Likewise Shakespeare in his sonnets:

Come, fair friend, you never can be old
For as you were when first your eyes I eyed,
Such is your beauty still.

I was under the impression that European poets were not aware of the phenomenon of eyes meeting — *aankhey chaar hona* — and transmitting messages of love. I was wrong. Byron on *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* has this:

"... and bright
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men,
A thousand hearts beat happily; and when
Music rose with its voluptuous swell,
Soft eyes looked love to eyes that spake again;
And all went merry as a marriage bell.

No one will question the Shakespearean observation that a woman has "language in her eyes". She can use its devastating effect when deployed as a side-winder missile — *tirchee nazar* which Milton described as "love-darting eyes". He saw "heaven in her eye" — presumably before he went blind. Thomas Moore ascribed his downfall to them:

"The light, that lies
In woman's eyes
Has been my heart's undoing."

Now to the Urdu poets. Shaad Azimabadi summed up their devastating effect in one couplet:

*"Voh chashme-mast, voh tirchee nazar maaz Allah!*
*Hayaa hazaar bharee hai, magar, maaz Allah!"*
(Those besotted eyes,
Those side-long glances
The Lord protect us!
Full of innocence
though they be
The lord protect us!)

Shah Wali-ur-Rehman wrote of both their positive and negative aspects:

*Jo phiree to tegh-e-qazaa banee*
*jo milee to aab-e-baqaa hanee*
(When they turned away, they became the sword of destruction. When they met my eyes
They were the elixir of life.)

Hasrat Mohani was intrigued by eyes which, like

photographs in which the sitter is looking into the lens, seem to follow you everywhere:

*Dekho jo yaar kee jaadoo nigahiyaan*
*har ik ko hai gumaan keh mukhaatib hameen rahey*
(Look at the magic in my beloved's eyes!
Everyone is under the illusion,
She is only looking at him.)

So the gossip and the *sherbaazi* went on and on; from gazelled-eyed Rekha to the almond-eyed Hema Malini to Greto Garbo-eyed Nandini Satpathi. The downpour continued and we adjourned to the Taverna Latina: We raised our glasses to drink to women's eyes:

"Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
And I'll not look for wine."

— *Sunday*, June, 1985

# *Confusions about Marriage*

As one who has been in and out of love many times but married only once, I am often asked by young people in love whether or not they should get married. My advice varies with what I know about their past and their temperaments. Some like me are forever falling in and out of love and would remain misfits in any monogamous union. Others who appear more steady and are marrying types tend to be possessive, jealous and more often than not, bores. So what advice am I to give them?

The commonest prevalent illusion is that people fall in love only once in their lifetimes. I forget the name of the poet and I am sure I have got his lines all mixed up. But this is how I recall them:

> Love wakes men once a lifetime each;
> They lift their heavy lids and look
> And lo, what one sweet page can teach
> They read with joy, then shut the book.
> And some give thanks and some blaspheme
> But most forget; but either way

That like a child's unheeded dream
Is all the joy of all their day.

Cyril Connolly subscribes to the one-life-love theory. He writes: "We love but once, for once only are we perfectly equipped for loving: we may appear to ourselves to be as much in love at other times — so will a day in early September, though it be six hours shorter, seem as hot as one in June. And on how that first true love affair will shape depends the pattern of our lives." He goes on to pronounce on the hazards of marrying on the basis of this first love. "First love is the one most worth having, yet the best marriage is often the second, for we should marry only when the desire for freedom is spent."

I don't buy this theory. Before I demolish it, let me admit that Connolly is right in his analysis of real love. "The object of loving is release from love... Complete physical union between two people is the rarest sensation which life can provide — and yet not quite real for it stops when the telephone rings." Connolly's telephone is metaphorical. What really happens is that the blissful physical union can never be repeated with the same person and the craving to experience it again tempts men and women to try it out with other people. They begin to fall apart. One or the other looks for excuses for misunderstandings that creep in; they begin to lie to each other; they pretend that their new attachments are platonic or emotional and not physical. That is the time for the wiser of the two to put an end to the relationship because the one who wishes to prolong it in the hope that it may be restored to its initial intensity, is the one who is going

to be hurt. I agree with Connolly when he ways, "When a love affair is broken off, the heaviest blow is to the vanity of the one who is left." So my advice to those in love who begin to suspect that their affection is no longer being reciprocated in the same measure, is to take courage and be the first to say, "Go to hell — or in the arms of your new lover. Leave me alone, I do not want to have anything to do with you."

With love being so chancy, is it sensible to go ahead and marry the person you love? Connolly thinks it is inadvisable. "...Every love affair must reach a point where it will attain marriage, and be changed, or decline, or wither" He advises that marriage is an experience everyone should go through and then live his own life. This amounts to advocating adultery to preserve a marriage. He is confused because a few pages later he condemns adultery as a token form of murder. "We do not murder the rival husband or wife but we murder their image." He thinks that two fears alternate in marriage, loneliness and bondage. "The dread of loneliness being keener than the fear of bondage, we get married."

Having quoted all there is against marriage, what do I tell young, people embarking on the venture? "By all means take the plunge but do not expect too much out of it. If you discover that it may not work out in good time, that is, before a child is on its way, have the courage to call it off and not corrode each other's existence. Marriage is essentially a dialogue between man and wife. And if it is carried on different wave-lengths, communication breaks down and it is best not to persist in it. Therefore it is wise not to start having a family before you have known each

other at least five years. But once you have children, you have to learn the art of appearing to them as being good parents. They must never be exposed to angry disagreements, and if you feel a compelling need to engage in extramarital relationships, make sure your children never get to know about them."

— *Sunday*, June, 1987

# *Men, Women, Sex and Marriage*

Rupika has just passed out of college. Her parents are on the look out for a suitable match for her. They invite the family of the prospective son-in-law for tea so that they can have a look at their daughter. They arrive in a swanky Mercedes Benz. While being served tea by Rupika they discuss her plus and minus points in whispers. Rupika hates the entire exercise and treats the visitors with cold disdain. Her parents are displeased with her behaviour and continue negotiations with the boy's family.

Rupika writes to her uncles, aunts, and an American girl she had befriended at college, an English girl and a woman wildlife photographer about the indignity suffered by Indian girls being inspected by prospective husbands and their family members. The letters are passed round and her correspondents write to each other. So we have a lovely correspondence on arranged marriages versus love marriages, the dowry system, which of the two sexes is the stronger sexually and in decision-making and so on.

While all this exchange of letters is taking place, Rupika gets selected as air-hostess by Air India. During one of her

flights she sees a handsome young passenger who also eyes her with approval. As he is about to disembark, he asks Rupika for her telephone number in London. Without thinking of the consequences Rupika gives it to him. Then alone in her hotel room she wonders if the young man will really ring her up. After many hours of suspense for Rupika, he does ring her up from Reykjavik (capital of Iceland). There the story ends.

It could have had the makings of a good novel but the author Dr R.W. Desai, professor of English Literature at Delhi University, did not have it in him to write one. So he made it into a compilation of letters. Every character speaks the same language — that of the professor of literature. The sports shop-keeper, the boutique-owner and the wildlife photographer, all sound highly erudite and quote liberally from the Old Testament, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Tennyson, Swift, Kafka, Yeats, Nietzche, Freud. Despite all this *Frailty, Thy Name is Woman* (Har Anand) is highly readable particularly for those interested in classical English prose and poetry. It also has plenty on man-woman relationship to produce lively conversation.

"Is marriage a male convenience, or a female device for securing free board and lodging, or is it a refuge (is that the right word?) for both the sexes?" Rupika of her uncle Rakesh. The learned uncle replies. "The whole institution of marriage is a female arrangement to ensure protection and provision while she rears her offspring. The male of the species is a wanderer, and, of course, he has to be so because on him rests the task of finding food." He goes on: "For the man marriage is a trap, for the woman it's

fulfilment. Here is a joke to cheer you up. Do you know what a "virgin" means? — literally? Man-trap! How? "Vir" in Latin is "man" (from which we have "virile"), and "gin" of course means "trap" — so, man trap!

Uncle Rakesh's letter is passed on to Nargis, the wildlife photographer. She asks for further elucidation. Uncle Rakesh replies: "Women are inherently possessive. This springs from the fact that they bear children. The mother carries the child within her own body for nine months; in other words, she possesses the child; the child is a part of her, just like her lungs, her kidneys, in fact, more so because human beings aren't really conscious of their lungs or their kidneys except mentally, whereas the mother is constantly conscious of the child in her womb. Her increasing size, weight, discomfort, the physical, mental and emotional changes she undergoes, all of the these are profoundly programmed into her psyche as woman. In other words, being a woman, not necessarily a mother, means having this possessive strand interwoven with her very nature. The woman is the great possessor, first of her husband, then of her child.

"Possession means a longing for permanence, for an unchanging condition. People who live in rented houses don't form the same attachment to the house as those who own their own houses. The woman wants the man to love her for ever and ever. She deliberately shuts her eyes to those two terrible enemies. Time and Change. Men are more realistic. They know that all things pass. And yet, it's precisely out of this tension between the two sexes that civilisation has evolved. Had this not been present, man would have become extinct like the many animals

that were overtaken by this fate. Why do I say this? Because I see this "push" and "pull" as masculine and feminine principles, respectively, both of which are essential for the survival of the human race.

"Man pushes himself from home and hearth in order to escape the shackles of wedlock. And so we have travellers, wanderers, explorers — all men — like Vaso da Gama, Amerigo Vespucci, Christopher Columbus, Hernan Fernandos Cortes, Sir Walter Raleigh, Francis Drake, Captain Scott, Hillary, Hunt, Tenzing, the list is endless. So also with spiritual explorers: men like Buddha, Zoroaster, Mohammed, all travelled widely before establishing their religions. This spirit of restless departure is perhaps best captured in Tennyson's famous poem *Ulysses* where the hero, now an old man, once again sets out on his travels. This sequel is not in Homer; it's Tennyson's salute to the spirit of the nineteenth, and the preceding, century, during which the British Empire was founded with the gradual acquisition of India by men like Clive and Hastings, of the West Indies, of Canada, of Australia. Without being an explorer himself, Tennyson has nevertheless embodied in this poem, perhaps his best, the very spirit of his age, of his nation. I studied the poem in school, so do forgive me for quoting a few lines — I'm still deeply moved by them:

*Come my friends.*
*'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.*
*Push off, and sitting well in order smite*
*The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds*
*To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths*
*Of all the western stars, until I die.*

*It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;*
*It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,*
*And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.*
*And yet the pull of woman is equally important."*

We know another Uncle, Anand, who expounds his views on sex:

"Given a suitable opportunity, men are potential rapists. Culture and civilisation are restraining forces. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying this potential is a bad thing. Far from it. It's the sex drive that keeps the human race going. This energy sublimated makes man the conqueror he is. Animals don't sublimate their sex drive, so their libido is all expended in sex. They make no attempt to improve their conditions of existence, to change their environment, unlike man who's constantly reaching beyond himself, an over-reacher. Not content with throwing a stone, he'll invent the sling, the bow and arrow, the gun. It's not just men whose libido is controlled by civilisation. Likewise deep down women want to be raped, though no sensible woman will ever admit this!"

Woman have the upperhand in marriage. The child she bears she knows is hers; but no husband can be sure that the child she bears is his or that of his best friend. Hence all the precautions taken by male dominated society: purdah, chastity belts, eunuchs to guard harems.

Uncle Rakesh goes into detail about men and women's sexuality: "The sexual anatomy of the male is a constant variable, the phallus ranging in size and form from diminutive flaccidity to enlarged turgidity, a comical state of affairs were it not at the same time so pathetic, for, in

my view, its variableness reflects exactly masculine inconstancy in love. 'Men were deceivers ever,' Shakespeare tells us, "One foot on sea and one on land/To one thing constant never.' The woman's anatomy, on the other hands, is unchanging, unvariable, and this reflects her constancy, her loyalty, devotion.

"Also, it's important to note that the male anatomy is such that whatever state of emotion it is in, is displayed; it cannot be concealed. Erotic desire in the male immediately manifests itself in the erection which is a public spectacle, so to speak. The signifier and the signified are one. Not so with the female: her anatomy protects, conceals her feeling which can always remain private. There is no public exhibition of her libido as with the male. She remains inviolate, her 'self' inscrutable, indecipherable. There is a certain beauty about mystery, and it's the female who preserves this within herself, mysterious, a riddle that cannot be solved by the crude, bungling male. Thus it's only another woman who can 'read' the mind of a woman; not the blundering male."

Aunt Saroj writes to Rupika quoting Germaine Greer: "She points out that the penis is, by itself, a relatively harmless and extremely vulnerable member. "The fact is,' she goes on to say, 'the vagina is constructed to deal with the worst that the penis can do. Men are dangerous but the penis is the least dangerous part of them.' Further, she ingeniously argues, 'Men do more harm with their hands, with their feet, with their elbows, with their knees. If this were not the case, then women would hardly submit when threatened with bashing. By all commonsense indications, it is worse to be battered than to submit to the sexual act,

yet battery is a less serious offence than rape." Germaine Greer has, with her expected sharpness of perception, identified the real trauma of rape — it's not so much physical as mental, emotional, even spiritual. So she reassures rape victims that their sense of guilt is self-created."

She destroys the Freudian theory of penis-envy: "Your suggestion that women accept the role of the weaker vessel because of penis-envy is very interesting. As you say, this is a theory that has been advanced and several feminists have seen signs of this in literature, including Shakespeare. I'm inclined to agree with you, but I'll also say that if the woman suffers from penis-envy, the man suffers from penis-anxiety — he's constantly worried about its size, its capacity to function, to perform. Did you see his little thing? is a question scornfully asked by one maid-servant of another in *My Secret Life* by Henry Spencer Ashbee. In another episode a character Joe has an affair with the maid-servant. "Oh, let me see it" (said Joe), pulling up her clothes. She pushed them down. "No, you saw it the other day. It's just the same; where is your thing?" Joe pulled it out ... Here is a good example of penis envy. The girl tacitly admits that what she has is 'just the same'; seeing it once is the same as seeing it a dozen times: "No, you saw it the other day," she says; on the other hand, Joe's "thing" is an interesting object, a toy to play with, its changeableness making it a source of entertainment.

Aunt Saroj has a poor opinion of men. They are destroying the world: "Men love power, and the machine gives it to them in full measure. The car, the motorbike, the aeroplane, and going back in time, the horse — all

these are extensions of his personality. Also let's not forget that they are all admirable substitutes for the intransigent female! The rider "mounts" the horse or the motorbike. Listen to the chief stylist at General Motors, William Mitchell, talking about the latest model Cadillac the company had just released: 'When you sat behind the wheel, you looked down that long hood, and then there were two headlight shapes, and then two fender curves — why, you felt excited just sitting there.' He is not saying very much, but whatever he is saying is clearly coming from the bottom of his soul! And look at the names that car manufacturers give the models they produce: Falcon, Mustang, Barracuda, Corvette, Sabre, Cougar, Bronco — creatures of the wild, predatory, rapacious."

While men are physically stronger than women, women are sexually their superiors. "The brothel is the most decisive demonstration of woman's supremacy over man," writes Aunt Saroj. How? A prostitute's patron spends in two ways. He pays money and depletes himself while in no way impairing her capacity for more.

So the argument goes back and forth bringing much food for thought. The conservative and the radical points of view are fairly presented and the readers' interest kept alive throughout.

— *The Week*, 18 September, 1994

# *The Beggar Maid*

For the first few months after taking over the editorship of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* I lived as a paying guest of a young Parsi couple in a flat in Churchgate. I did not know many people, so had very little social life. I walked to office every morning and walked back every evening as I refused to use the car and chauffeur provided for me.

Among the earliest friends I made was A.G. Noorani who combined practising law with journalism. He was, and is a, bachelor. We began to spend our evenings together: we would go for a stroll along Marine Drive and return to my flat.

I had my evening ration of Scotch; Noorani who was, and is, a teetotaller had a glass of aerated water. Then we set out to try different restaurants in the neighbourhood. After dinner we tried different *paanwallahs* and bade each other good night. This routine was upset with the onset of the monsoon in Bombay when I ran into the lady about whom I write today.

There was a break in the downpour. I was alone as I

stepped out of a restaurant. A gas station and a few shops were on my way home. I stopped there to buy myself a *paan* and chatted with a *bhelpuriwallah* and asked him how was his business during the rains: not very well, he admitted. "*Magar iski kismat jaag jatee hai*" (her fortune increases) he added pointing to a woman sitting on the steps of a shop nearby. "What I can't sell, I give to her. She is a beggar. *Thori paagal hai* (she is a little mad)." I looked at the woman hungrily gulping *bhelpuri.* An uncommonly attractive girl, she was in her mid-twenties.

Fair, beautifully proportioned, uncombed hair wildly scattered about her face, a dirty white *dhoti* untidily draped around her body: I gazed at her for quite some time and wondered what an attractive young woman was doing alone in this vice-ridden city. I fantasised about her long into the night.

Thereafter I made it a point to buy my after-dinner paan from the same *paanwallah* by the gas station, exchanged a few words with the *bhelpuriwallah* as I ogled at the beggar maid on the steps of the closed shop. I often saw her talking to herself. I tried to buy *bhelpuri* to give to the girl, but the stall-owner rejected my offer. He had plenty of left-overs and feeding the girl was his monopoly.

One evening while I was at dinner the clouds burst in all their fury and roads around Churchgate were flooded. I tucked my trousers up to my knees, took my sandals in my hands, unfurled my umbrella to save my turban and waded through the swirling muddy water. Both the *paanwallah* and the *bhelpuriwallah* had shut shop and gone home. I saw the beggar girl stretched out on the marble steps barely an inch above the stream of rain water running

past her. She couldn't have had anything to eat that night. I was sorely tempted to give her some money but was not sure how she would react. I walked home thinking about her, and thought about her into the late hours of the night.

It poured all through the night. As I woke up to look out of the window which overlooked the maidan with the Rajabhai clock tower on the other side, the rain was still coming down in sheets. The maidan was flooded. I saw the shadowy figure of a woman walking across the maidan with a tin in hand. I saw her hike her wet dhoti and start splashing water between her buttocks. I trained my field glasses on her. She turned to look if any one was around. Having reassured herself that she wasn't being watched she took off her dhoti and stood stark naked in the pouring rain. It was my beggar woman. She poured dirty water on her body, rubbed her bosom, waist, arms and legs. The "bath" over she put the wet dhoti back on her and sloshed her way back towards Churchgate station.

The vision of Venus arising out of the sea in the form of a beggar maid of Bombay haunted me for many days that I was away in Delhi. When I returned to Bombay I made it a point to go to Churchgate for my after-dinner stroll. The *paanwallah* and the *bhelpuriwatah were there.* But not the beggar. I asked the *bhelpuriwallah* what had happened to girl. His eyes filled with tears and his voice choked as he replied: "Saaley bharooay utha ke lay gaye" (the bloody pimps abducted her).

# SEX

# *Nature and Sex in the Classics*

I have often lamented my countrymen's indifference to the phenomenon of nature and double standards on matters of sex; outward prudishness combined with inner prurience. This was certainly not so 2,000 years ago. I have just been reading Dr Manmohan Ghosh's translation of *Chaturbhani* written some time between 200-350 B.C.—*Glimpses of Sexual life in Nanda Maurya India* (Manisha Granthalaya, Rs 50)—and been pleasantly surprised to see the author's familiarity with the flora and fauna of the region, the explicit and often indelicate reference to sex. Although a long list of the *dramatis personae* appear, they are in part long monologues by one man on courtesans and their patrons as they pass by him on their way to or returning from the houses of pleasure. This *Vilasakaundini* (vessel of coquetry) whose beauty "sprinkles the eyes with ambrosia" becomes like all other women characters even lovelier following "fatigue of intercourse" with swollen lips and scars of violent lust of "a festival of amour decorated with scratches of nails".

"The blooming lotus is her face, the buds of white

flowers are her teeth, fresh blue lilies are her eyes, the red *asoka* flowers are her throbbing lips, humming of bees is her speech. Best bouquets (of flowers) are her breasts, flowers on the head are her ornament, loose flowers are her garments, and garlands are her shining girdle. The bower range, which is the bride of spring, has assumed indeed a female form by its (various) flowers." The hermaphrodite is praised because her breasts do not come in the way of a closer embrace, is not inhibited from sex for certain days in the month as other women are and there is "no risk of conception which is an enemy of physical charm and progress of youth"—whatever that means.

Our ancestor's concept of beauty was somewhat bizarre: bosom too heavy for the slender waist, round buttocks as large as the behind of a maddened elephant in rut. And so on. The wife comes off very poorly when compared to the courtesan. "Once on the chariot of a courtesan's hips, who will consciously opt for a married wife?" demands the author of one of the plays and replies, "No one consciously leaves off a chariot to ride in a bullock-cart."

—*The Illustrated Weekly of India*, May 1976

# *Dirty Monsoon Musings*

Comes the monsoon and something happens to my ageing heart. It can no longer suffer politicians and their protestations of love for the poor or their denunciations of each other. I cannot read newspapers which laud the wit of men in power. So I decide to write a definitive thesis on love and lust: which came first, the desire or its fulfilment? To my dismay I discover I have nothing new to say. Nimbus clouds stretch across the heavens, a cool breeze blows across my balcony, a gentle shower bring the fragrance of the earth to my nostrils. And I am sick and desolate of a passion which I cannot put in words.

Once I wrote an analysis of the phenomenon of love—why two persons are drawn towards each other, what happens when they translate that attraction into love. And why it so often goes awry. I based it on the theory that everyone is deeply lonely within himself and is equally motivated to share that loneliness as well as to preserve it against trespass. We express our liking by denuding ourselves, by laying open our hearts and inviting the person we like to trespass into out inner solitude. Then comes a

stage when the desire to preserve that inner solitude becomes stronger than the desire to share it and we say to ourselves and to the person we think we love: "Thus far and no further." That writes *finis* to that escapade and we are ready to launch into another. Love is transitory: one dies, a new one burgeons with each new monsoon. Lust abides till we can lust no more.

I consult the writings of great lovers and my belief is confirmed. From Chaucer and Shakespeare to Whitman, D.H. Lawrence and the versifiers of today; from Kalidasa, Bhartrhari down to Iqbal and Faiz, the songs of love are anaemic but songs of lust are full-blooded and earthy. "When spirit and body interanimate (a very apt concoction) each other," writes Stamford, "they produce that lyrical experience: fulfilment." But when the trafficking between them is unequal; when they are speaking as it were, in different tongues, then as T.S. Eliot wrote: "Between conception and creation, between emotion and response, between desire and the spasm, between potency and existence, falls the shadows."

It is the "shadow" that frustrates both love and lust and explodes into bawdiness stored up in the minds of poets. There is less seeking for response, more imposing of one's own desires, as in Donne:

> *License my roving hands, and let them go*
> *Before, behind, between, above, below.*

All men are born *voyeurs* preferring the childish delights of stumbling on a scene of unsuspecting nymphs unclothed rather than stage-managed acts of strip-tease. The male ego is unconcerned with response. Who would

suspect the gentle Whitman of lust to sire a whole nation?

*...you women, I make my way,*
*I am stern, acrid, large,*
*Undissuadable, but I love you,*
*I do not hurt you any more*
*Than is necessary for you;*
*I pour the stuff to start sons and daughters*
*Fit for these States.*

David Gascoyne, despite his "limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous", is gentler than Whitman: "...Bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn." My favourite for the mystic experience of sex is Shelley:

*...and over all.*
*A mist was spread, the sickness of a deep*
*And speechless swoon of joy, as might befall*
*Two disunited spirits when they leap.*
*In union from this earth's obscure and fading sleep*

And Rossetti (the male Rossetti) for the calm that follow consummation:

*And as the last slow sudden drops are shed*
*From sparkling caves when all the storm has fled.*

So love finds its ultimate destiny in lust, or it ends up like a sea voyage on which you get only *mal de mer.* Donne describes it:

*Who ever loves, if he does not propose*
*The right true end of love, he's the one that goes*
*To sea from nothing but to make him sick*

Somewhat confused thinking. But that's what happens to me at monsoon time. It is the season of *bhang.*

—*The Illustrated Weekly of India,* August 1977

# *Libber at a Loss*

An incident beneath my balcony made me aware of yet another wrong women have suffered at the hands of men over the ages. Brawls are so frequent an occurrence in my locality that I seldom bother to get up to see what is going on. But when it involves a man and a woman I even go down on the street to prevent the man from getting too rough with the woman. Consequently, when I heard male and female voices rise to a quarrelsome pitch I came out. There was this fellow about six foot tall and as villainous looking as any *dakoo* in an Indian film. And facing him a petite, pigtailed lass in *shalwar-kamiz* sporting a sling-bag in the manner of ladies who frequent our footpaths after sundown. She was getting the better of the argument. The man driven to desperation replied with an obscene gesture with his hand. The woman rewarded him with a resounding slap across his face and a full-blooded oath: *"Sala! Haramzada!"* Now, I said to myself, this *dakoo* will make mince-meat of this maiden. Not at all. The maiden followed up her opening jab with flail of fists: left, right, under the chin, ending with a vicious kick in the

fellow's genitals which made him double up with pain. Then she delivered a *coup de grace* by a double-handed karate chop on the neck which sent him sprawling on the cobblestones. It was a heart-warming performance. But what bothered me was the use of masculine abuse which accompanied each blow: she swore to rape his mother, sister and daughter. Despite the prowess with her hands, the lady like others of her sex did not possess the wherewithal to execute those threats. Why couldn't she have sworn to molest his father, brother or son?

Being called a male chauvinist pig does not really offend the male; on the contrary it adds to his notions of masculinity, his machismo. And although another male expressing libidinous intent towards his female relatives can incense a man, it does not when the same is expressed by a woman. It is time women libbers coined their own phraseology of abuse for men.

—*The Illustrated Weekly of India,* January 1978

# *Obscenity, Pornography, Erotica*

I have often been charged with vulgarising literature. I plead guilty on purely etymological grounds; *vulgarisation,* as the word is used in French, is closer to its original Latin meaning, popularisation, bringing it closer to the people. But when the charge is extended to obscenity or pornography or erotica, I enter a mild protest. My traducers do not know what these words mean and lump them together under a favourite portmanteau Indianism: "indecent". Let me analyse these concepts and clear some of the cobwebs from their minds.

Pornography derives from the Greek *porne* meaning harlot and initially referred to the influence of harlots in the government of Rome in the 10th century AD. Obscenity is from the Latin *obscensus* meaning repulsive, filthy or loathsome. Erotic from Eros, another name for Cupid, the god of Love; hence erotica includes literature, painting or sculpture on themes of love or sex. Although usage has blurred distinctions between the three, we must be clear in our minds what we are talking about and whether their use has a detrimental effect on society.

Erotica has become an artistic concept. Artists who express themselves in erotic sculpture (Khajuraho, etc) or painting (e.g. Tantric and Rajasthani miniatures) and have explicit portrayal of the sex act cannot and never have been accused of pornography. You can pick up any number of books on the subject without fear of the censor. It is the same with writing. If *Lady Chatterley's Lover, Lolita,* etc, can be allowed in books, there is little logic in coming down on similar writing in magazines.

Pornography does not have literary or artistic pretensions. But it exists more in the mind of the beholder ("groin of the beholder" would be a better expression) than in itself. It is designed to exploit or titillate the senses—"books you read with one hand". You don't have far to go to find titillation if your mind is on the lookout. Present-day ads for cigarettes, cosmetics and textiles are specifically sex-oriented. As Shaw said: "Pornography can be found in any book except the telephone book." And the puritan can discover impure things which nobody else can discover. However, there is pornography which is low down and pornography which is not. In the classical age of Greece, *porniar* were the lowest class of prostitutes (*tawaaif*) giving sex for money; *anletriades* were courtesan-entertainers. The first were looked down upon; the second respected. In the ultimate analysis, what a person regards as porno is determined by his intention and, since his definition inevitably reflects his own interest, no definition can be satisfactory. "You can recognise pornography by the insult it offers, invariably, to sex and the human spirit," wrote the author of *Lady Chatterley.*

Much is said about pornography tending to "deprave

and corrupt" society, particularly the young. This has never been proved to be so. On the contrary, there is plenty of psychological evidence to prove the contrary—that like prurient day-dreams it provides escape into a world of fantasy. Free and easy availability of pornographic literature instead of increasing crimes of sex is known to reduce its incidence.

Besides, I observe a certain finesse in the exploitation of nudity and language. I am reminded of a bet taken by a man that he would use the unmentionable vulgarism for the rectum three times in the presence of his very sedate Victorian, hostess. He apparently knew that there would be soles for breakfast. "Ah soles!" he exclaimed as he saw them on the table. "Are soles in season? They are soles, aren't they?"

—*The Illustrated Weekly of India,* May 1978

# *Aphrodisiac*

Some years ago a friend in his late sixties acquired a wife half his age. He was a quiet man with a lot of self-assurance. Suddenly, the self-assurance was gone and he became aggressively self-conscious. Although his wife produced two children in quick succession, it did not restore his self-confidence. And the way his friends felicited him did not help: "Congrats! it doesn't take much to put a young woman with child, does it?"

Since no more children came, he became even more self-concious. He would veer the conversation round to how sexually well-adjusted he and his wife were. "I will let you into the secret", he whispered in my ear one evening "sexual appetite does not diminish with age provided you are regular in your bowel movements. Clean bowels, good sex. Constipation or loose bowels and you are done for by the time you are forty". That made good sense. I recalled Nabokov's *Lolita* giving her aged step-father lover ice-cream which produced so much gas in his belly that he could not function. But the recipe my friend prescribed for clean stomach-good sex was new to me:

"Table-spoon full of bran (roughage-*chokhar*) with every meal and your lady friend will be singing like a nightangle."

I now learn that bran does more than keep a young wife on the straight and narrow path of matrimonial fidelity to a papa-aged husband. It can even sink a battle-ship. Doctor Cleave of the British ship *King George V* discovered this during World War I. He found that most of his men suffered from constipation and the gunners were incapable of shooting straight. Before taking on the German navy, he put his men on a regimen of bran. He records in his *Memoirs,* "They went to the gents like clockwork". Thus with their morale boosted 100%, writes the doctor, they took on Kaiser's *Bismark* and sent it down to the bottom of the sea.

Dr. Cleave's book *The Saccharine Disease* propagates the consumption of bran, roughage and bananas as a regular part of human diet and the banning of refined sugar and cyclamates. It has become a best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic. The doctor quotes the Bible in support: "When the sound of grinding is low, the doors shall be shut in the streets" (*Ecclesiastes*). Grinding, the learned doctor now 72, interprets as the sound of teeth crunching fibrous food; and the doors as the anal orifice. So the next time you want to take on a young, lusty maiden or sink a battleship, remember bran is best, better than spanish fly, *kushta,* or any other electuary and more potent than a 16 mm recoilless gun.

— *New Delhi,* April 1979

# *Our Own Virginity on Trial*

Whoever made virtue and virginity conterminous could not have known many nubile virgins. Whoever made virginity the *sine qua non* for a permit to proceed to England must be both a crass idiot and a racist. Did it ever occur to him that by failing a young lady in the test he was jeopardising her prospects of matrimony?

However the object of my bringing up this unsavoury topic is to draw attention to the double standards we Indians adopt when it comes to judging other people. Some of the spleen we vented against British immigration officials for humiliating Indian women intending to emigrate to England could be directed at ourselves. The other day a comely young lass who had been an air-hostess with Air-India told me that when selected for the job, she and her entire batch were put through a virginity test. I asked her if there was anything in the application form or conditions of service which required air-hostesses to be virgins. She replied that it was not so. Nor did she know the exact object of the test being carried out except that it was wholly unexpected and unpleasant. It is likely that since

most, if not all, girls selected by Air-India for the job are good lookers, the doctor could not resist the temptation of getting a kick out of the probe. I have little doubt the Air-India PRO will deny this. I have less doubt that it is true.

— *New Delhi,* April 1979

# *The Right to go Nude*

It was more than twenty years ago that I was first exposed to people exposing themselves. This was in Sweden. Literally miles of beach with almost everyone from toddlers to octogenarians with not a stitch of clothing on them. I could not ogle at all the nubile nineteen year olds as I would have liked to. I was almost drooling in the mouth when my hosts suggested that we all strip and refresh ourselves in the sea. The drooling stopped; my throat went dry. My Indian inhibitions against self-exposure were too strong to overcome. I couldn't even raise my eyes to take a good look at my hostess and her three college-going daughters. I tried to analyse my nudo-phobia and came to the conclusion that I was more scared of taking off my turban and exposing my long hair than I was of taking off my pants and exposing...you know what. I was even more scared of my natural reactions: of showing obvious pleasure at seeing what I was seeing without having to say so. The visions of that sunny Sunday afternoon near Stockholm has troubled many of my mid-nights and my noons' repose.

Since then I have seen a lot of nudity on the beaches of Hawaii, Cote d'azur and Sydney. I am an unashamed voyeur and liked it all. I was delighted to learn that stodgy old England is about to legalise stripping. As one might expect of a nation of shopkeepers it is not for the sake of health or for the aesthetic pleasure of seeing beautiful people as God made them, but to make money. The issue has come up before the Brighton City Council dominated by conservatives. It would appear that while the lady members are in favour of shedding clothes; the men have certain reservations. A lady member who also runs a lodging house has proved her *bona fides* by circulating her own photograph in a topless bikini. The reactions of the other members to this form of canvassing is not known. But a male member who is opposed to "flagrant exhibition of mammary glands" has been warned by his wife that if he continues to be obdurate she will release his photograph taking a Sauna bath in mixed company. She clearly has her eye on the cash register. She says "I am not a woman of immoral character, I'm one of the most old-fashioned girls. I do not take the pill or go to bed with men, but I believe in this beach. Let's face the facts—we want European tourists, and we want their money. So let's give the sort of facilities they're used to."

The lady may be getting far more than she is bargaining for. But even the stodgiest of the councillors concedes that she may have a point. He admits that sometime ago when he chanced upon a couple taking off their clothes he was struck by the beauty of the well-endowed woman and suddenly thought "that all those years of tedious committees had been worthwhile".

There may be unexpected pleasures awaiting visitors to Brighton. To wit:

There was a brave damsel of Brighton
Whom nothing could possibly frighten.
She plunged into the sea
And, with infinite glee,
Was taken for a ride by a Triton.

That brings me to the subject of incentives to tourism in India. I dare not suggest that we too go in for nude bathing to attract foreigners, but let us not be too prudish when they wish to expose themselves to our sun, sea, sands and our gazes. Take it from me that nothing will add to the beauty of Calangute or Kovalam more than a shapely teenager streaking across the palm fronds against the setting sun.

— *New Delhi,* September 1979

# *My Experiments with My Body*

Are you fat and forty? Dyspeptic and constipated? Uptight, overworked, and losing your virility? Don't despair. You can still shed your spare tyre, regain those rock-hard muscles, and feel ready to take on half the population of the world—the female half!

I am not sure at what age I became consciously concerned with my body. Certainly not as a child. In adolescence I became aware of its many shortcomings. I was not as tall as I would like to have been. I was squat, short-necked and prone to put on fat at the wrong places. I wanted to be an athlete: a long-distance runner, a tennis champion and a hockey ace. I wanted to build my muscles and become a *Bharat Shri.* Much as I tried I could not achieve any of these ambitions.

A severe attack of typhoid fever followed by two relapses left my intestines in very poor shape. When I recovered from the fever I discovered that my digestive system had been seriously impaired. Almost everything I liked to eat disagreed with me. I suffered from indigestion, flatulence and constipation. And as usual with people with bad

stomachs I became prone to many ailments. Migraine was a monthly affair. One cold followed another; catarrh became chronic and often made my life a misery. I was often reminded of the Arabic proverb: "He who has health has hope; he who has hope has everything." I had lost both health and hope.

In middle age I learnt to enjoy alcohol; just any kind of alcohol. The years in the diplomatic and international civil service where cocktails, wines and spirits were *de rigueur* with every meal (and in between meals) played havoc with my system. I consulted all kinds of doctors, *hakims* and *vaids*. What they prescribed gave me relief—but only for short durations. Following Voltaire's advice that everyone should be his own physician, I decided to examine my body, make my own diagnosis and take myself in hand.

I had always believed in strenuous exercise. I had no patience with yoga which I found very boring. Besides, exertion that did not make me sweat out the poison in my system and leave me pleasantly exhausted was not my concept of exercise. Consequently though I had reconciled myself to being a second-rater in sports I continued to indulge in vigorous tennis, hockey and squash.

Outwardly I managed to look fitter than most men of my age. For my inner ailments I sought the advice of a naturopath. I was then in my middle forties and living in London. Dr Leif, an Austrian, ran a nature-cure clinic in sylvan Hertfordshire, about 30 miles from London. He had converted an old country manor called Champneys into a kind of hospital-cum-rest house. This had become the subject of much humour; the inmates were usually

referred to as "Leif's loonies" or "Champney's chimps". I joined this "lunatic" group.

I was examined by Dr Leif. My heart, blood-pressure, urine, stool *et al,* and pronounced fine. I then told him of internal problems. He invited me to have all my meals with him. I was to eat and drink what I did every day. Alongside my seat at the dining table he placed a large glass bowl. Into this bowl he poured the equivalent of everything I consumed: morning cups of tea; egg, bacon, toast and coffee I took for breakfast; cups of mid-morning coffee; cocktails and lunch; afternoon tea; whiskey, steak, vegetables with the appropriate wines followed by coffee and cognac. Then we retired for a chat by the fireside. He brought the glass bowl full of the slop. By then the food and alcohol had fermented and bubbles were popping out of it. He weighed the stuff in my presence and asked me to smell it. It was foul and weighed over a couple of kilos. All he said to me was "if you stuff all this into yourself everyday, how do you expect your poor body to cope with it?" The message went home. The only treatment he prescribed was 15 days of fasting followed by a week of instructions about what to eat.

I discovered that before undertaking a fast the stomach must be thoroughly cleansed otherwise the body tends to absorb the festering food that is in it. This can have deleterious effects. I was put through what was known as "colonic irrigation". A penis-sized gadget with two tubes was inserted in my rectum. One tube pumped in warm water, the other sucked it out with the contents of the stomach. I wondered what pleasure homosexuals got out of buggery. However, this was followed by an oil massage

and a vigorous rubbing of salf. By the end of the morning I was thoroughly exhausted.

Although I felt as clean as the proverbial whistle, I was ravenously hungry. 'Lunch' consisted of a single orange. 'Tea' was a glass of tepid water spiked with honey. 'Dinner' another orange. For the next few days I dreamt of nothing but my favourite dishes. There were a number of pretty starlets who sprawled about the lawns taking the sun in complete nudity. They did not interest me one bit. A juicy, well-done steak with a bottle of Macon followed by a ton of ice-cream topped with hot chocolate sauce was what I craved for more than sex. But all I got were two oranges and lots of hot water. And a few more colonic irrigations. On the fourth day there was humming in my ears. Two days later the humming disappeared. So did the craving for food. I shed many kilos of fat without any discomfort.

The ordeal came to an end. I was broken back into the food habit with a bowl of yoghurt (*dahi*) which took me a long time to eat. It was followed by salad and uncooked vegetables.

An amusing incident which sticks in my mind concerned two inmates of Champneys. One was a tailor from Leeds. He was a man of gigantic proportions and an unquenchable thirst for liquor. Three weeks of fasting and abstinence from alcohol had knocked out most of his fat. He proudly displayed the gap between his trousers and his now shrunken belly. Three days before he was due to leave he succumbed to the temptation of taking out one of the starlets (likewise hungry and thirsty) to a pub.

The effect of liquor on their cleansed stomachs was lethal. When the pub closed they bought themselves a

bottle of gin and decided to spend the night together. Despite the bouts of sex, they were uproariously drunk in the morning. The staff put them through colonic irrigations, massages, ice water douches. It was of no avail. When Dr Leif came to hear of the gross violation of rules (drinking not sex) he reprimanded them in front of all the other patients and ordered them out of the institution. Neither of them was in the least bit repentant. "All this bloody fasting was worth this one night," roared the tailor. They left Champneys arm-in-arm.

When I returned to London I had trouble with my eyes and had to consult an optician. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that my glasses needed changing because my eyesight had improved.

Nothing made me more conscious of my body than those three weeks amongst Leif's loonies. Thereafter I began to be selective of the food I ate and watched my weight every day. Migraines disappeared. The colds became less frequent. All I did to avoid them was to take cold baths throughout the winter and an occasional tablet of Vitamin C. (Dr Linus Pauling, twice, Noble laureate, says that Vitamin C is, the only answer to the common cold.)

I developed an unpleasant trait of mocking people with paunches. I recall telling the then somewhat corpulent General Kulwant Singh that if I were the Defence Minister I would sack any soldier who had a paunch. He rudely ordered me out of his office. To an assembly of Sikhs who were critical of my unorthodox ways I retorted by saying that anyone who was physically unfit had no business to call himself a Sikh. Hadn't Guru Gobind Singh exhorted the Khalsa

*Sada rahey kanchan, *** kaya*
*Kal noa kabhoon byapai*

Let your body be like burnished gold; No ill will ever befall it.

Indians in their forties should be particularly careful with their bodies. The burden of the country rests heavily on the shoulders of the university-educated and the affluent who form a very small proportion of the population of the country. It is in the forties that they usually come to the top of their professions or other businesses. And it is in the forties that they begin to indulge themselves in more food and drink than is necessary for them, keep indifferent hours, take less exercise and usually begin, to suffer from ailments like ulcers, piles, high blood pressure, etc which take a heavy toll of their efficiency and eventually kill them.

It is in the forties and the fifties that they must, if they have not learnt before, control their diet and exercise. The moral is that a rich man who wants to be healthy must learn to live like a poor man. If they do not do so, they will only murder themselves and be guilty of homicide in the second degree. A simple rule for diet was prescribed by the *Talmud:* one third of the stomach should have food, one third drink and the remaining third should be empty. It should be borne in mind that more people die of over-eating and drinking than are killed in wars.

Danny Kaye, the celebrated comedian who I happened to be interviewing over All India Radio told me the secret of his youthful vitality (he was 75, looked 55 and was agile as a panther). "I take a little exercise," he said, "it takes

no more than a few seconds twice a day. You do it; you'll remain fit all your life."

"A few seconds twice a day?" I asked in disbelief. "What kind of exercise is that?"

"At lunch and at dinner when I am offered a second helping I waggle my head to indicate, no."

The guiding principle should be to eat little and eat right. Everyone should carefully watch what kinds of food disagree with him and rigorously eliminate them from his diet. I find milk and milk products (except *dahi*) make me sluggish or bilious. Cakes, pastries—all kinds of sweets give me flatulence. So do highly spiced things like *chaat* or *bhel.* Whenever I indulge in them, the self-generated gas in the stomach makes me like a jet plane. Others take all these in their stride but are upset by meat, eggs or *saag.*

It is best to prepare your own menu—keeping in mind that it must ensure regular, easy evacuation. A constipated stomach is an invitation to disease. You will notice that if the stomach is not clean even a mild toothache will be aggravated, athlete's foot becomes more itchy and dandruff erupts in your scalp.

Living in Bombay for nine years, I rarely used my car. I walked to the office and back everyday. I reduced my lunch to the minimal of a bowl of soup or yoghurt and fruit. I continued playing tennis—usually mixed doubles where I combined exercise with some mild flirtation.

I also joined the Taj Health Club. It was the hours spent at the club and discussions with the Director, Mrs Rama Bans, which convinced me that everyone who can afford it should join a health club. This lady, a grandmother in her fifties, has the face of a young woman in her thirties.

She made a diet chart for me; "Control your intake of calories and you will not put on an extra ounce," she said. And so it was. One extra drink, one extra helping of a sweet dish and it showed on the weighing machine next day. I learnt to miss a meal to compensate for the over-indulgence of the day before.

At the Taj Health Club in Bombay there was an assortment of members hoping for different kinds of benefits. There were film-stars and obese Gujarati ladies only interested in shedding weight; there were men both young and old who wanted to become more potent. And there were business executives who just wanted to get rid of their tensions and relax. I believe in certain measure all of them got what they were looking for.

Health clubs in our five-star hotels are expensive affairs. But much cheaper than doctors and medicine bills. And if used regularly they cost no more than Rs 5 day which is less than the cost of the hot water, soap, towels, talcum powder, etc. which are consumed. There is no better place for studying your body and rectifying things that have gone wrong than a health club. It keeps a record of your weight, girth, blood-pressure. The slightest deviation is noticed and you will be told what to do about it.

Since most men and women who frequent health clubs are in their middle years and unable to play strenuous games, the gymnasium provides them gentler ways of exercising themselves. A yoga instructor is always available for personal guidance; there are yoga classes for those who wish to do them *en masse*. The gymnasium is equipped with a variety of gadgets: the electric belt and cycle to tone up the muscles. The whirlpool with jets of hot water which

directed to parts of the body you wish to reduce can be most beneficial. Then there is the sauna or the steam bath followed by immersion in a chilled pool. You sweat it out in an overheated room, the icy water gives a pleasant jolt to the system. Every session of this hot-cold immersion has to be followed by a few minutes of rest on a flat wooden bench. The sense of relaxation is blissful. An oil massage once a week tones up the body and squeezes tensions out of the system like water squeezed out of a sponge.

At the end of an hour or two in the health club you feel as light as a feather. As I put it in my vulgar lingo, you'll feel like taking on half the population of the world—the female half. The evening drink goes down better, the food tastes tastier and you sleep the sleep of the just.

Many famous men have written a lot of rubbish about health. Someone has said that people who spend most of their time watching their health have little time to enjoy it. It is true that concern with health should not become an obsession and there should be a certain amount of calculated carelessness about it. But it cannot be argued that it must take top priority in everyone's scale of values. When Jonathan Swift prescribed Dr Diet, Dr Quiet and Dr Merriman as the three best doctors in the world, what he meant was that you yourself must watch your food, teach yourself the art of quiet solitude—and cheerfulness will follow as the night the day.

— *New Delhi,* March 1980

# *Acharya Rajneesh and Sex*

I go along with Rajneesh on most things he says including sex. People who suppress the sex instinct by taking vows of celibacy soon develop and obsession about it by transferring it from their groins to their heads. Being more preoccupied rather than occupied with it they became mentally sick, intolerant, vengeful, stubborn and uncharitable towards others.

"All forms of repression can be traced back to two fundamental fears: the fear of death and the fear of sex", says Acharya Rajneesh. From these anxieties rise feelings such as anger, jealousy, envy, lust and fear. His prescription for overcoming the fear of death is to give direct exposure of near-death experiences to patients. Members are exhorted to spend their repressed aggression by letting off steam by abusing each other and even fighting in specially built, padded rooms where no physical injury can be done to anyone. For sex repression, he advocates Tantric techniques. Groups of about 20 indulge in whatever form of sexual expression they have harboured in their fantasies but have had to repress owing to feelings of guilt imposed

by parents, society or religious norms. They are not, as many people imagine, group orgies of the sort one sees portrayed in magazines like *Playboy* or *Penthouse* where everyone is seen to be mightily enjoying themselves. On the contrary pictures of Rajneesh's Tantric session seem more like scenes from a torture chamber with girls screaming in agony (perhaps ecstasy) and every other participant as grim-faced as the angel of death.

But why bring God and religion into something which seems to be entirely a technique of psychiatric treatment? Let the Acharya answer it in his own words. "Nothing exists except God", he maintains, and continues, "man has never been accepted in his totality ... The West has chosen only the body and forgotten the soul ... it is the culture of the *without*. The Eastern culture is the culture of the *within*. The East tries to live only as a soul and the West tries to live only as a body ... I am teaching people to live a simple life ... I am a materialist-spiritualist."

I am not sure if these therapies do in fact deliver the goods. But an ever-increasing number of Rajneesh's disciples vouch for its efficacy and I am willing to take their word for it. I only wish they looked a little more cheerful after their self-proclaimed liberation from fear. I also do not understand their saffron robes, the Rajneesh lockets round their necks and their outlandish names whereby Robert Birnbaum becomes Swami Prem Amitabh, Wendy Wyatt becomes Ma Prem Karma and my friend Saeed Sattar becomes Krishna Mohammed.

— *Sunday*, October 1980

# *Lying About Sex*

Why are some men prone to lie and boast about their sexual exploits? Havelock Ellis wrote of his marathon performances in bed when most of his friends knew he was impotent. Our own (and Pakistan's) Josh Malihabadi in his autobiography *Yaadon ki Baraat* would have us believe that no woman from 16 to 60, virgin, wife, divorcee or widow could resist him. Nor could young boys when the poet's fancy turned to pederasty. Now we have the French novelist, Georges Simenon, claiming to have laid over 10,000 women. He gives the lurid details of his sex life in an autobiographical series of which he has so far published 22 in 11 years. He is 80 and apparently still hammering away on his typewriter and his women.

Simenon is a freak. He started life as a journalist but discovered that there was more money in books. With demoniac energy he set about churning out stuff at the rate of a chapter a day, a novel a week, totalling a minimum of 20 books a year. At the age of 28 he created a character, Maigret, the French counterpart of Father Brown and Sherlock Holmes, a kindly, cunning detective and flooded

the world with Maigret serials. Money cascaded in like the Niagara falls. With money came women. He had married young. He fled France when partisans threatened to kill him as a collaborator, divorced his first wife to marry another; then he returned to Europe to resume relationship with the first while continuing with the second and added a mistress to make a *menage a quatre.* The three women could not put the fire out of his groins; so at the end of every working day he found himself a whore to quench it. He exposed all his amours in great detail to the press and in his autobiographies. His daughter could not take it and ended her life with her own hands.

Simenon is as compulsive a liar as he was a fornicator. What drove him to these excesses in writing and womanising is explained in a recently published biography by Fenton Bresler. Writing created wind in Simenon's belly; when he failed to expel it from the right orifice he threw up. About his countless affairs — quickies, (love is only another four letter word in Simenon's lexicon) — Bresler opines that he lives in a world of fantasy, lies all the time and in due course comes to believe that they were true.

— *Sunday,* May, 1983

# *Kama to Rama*

There are many ways of attaining godhood, say teachers of religion. Acharya Rajneesh disagrees and says there is only one way and sexual intercourse is the first step towards it. He maintains that religion as it is practised, is false and its propagators are agents of Satan. They have degraded love and taught us the negation of life. The philosophy of religion has always been death-oriented instead of being life-oriented. He goes on to add: "I call religion the art of living. Religion is not a way to undermine life, it is a medium for delving deeply into the mysteries of existence. Religion is not turning one's back on life, it is facing life squarely. Religion is not escaping from life; religion is embracing life fully. Religion is the total realisation of life."

Since love is the essence of all religions and sex the essence of love, you cannot side-step it to proceed on your voyage of discovery. Rajneesh writes, "Sex is the beginning of the journey to love. The origin, the Gangotri of the Ganges of Love, is sex, passion — and everybody behaves like its enemy. Every culture, every religion, every guru,

every seer has attacked this Gangotri, this source, and the river has remained bottle up. The hue and cry has always been, "Sex is sin. Sex is irreligious. Sex is poison, but we never seem to realise that ultimately it is the sex energy itself that travels to and reaches the inner ocean of love. Love is the transformation of sex energy."

Because sex has been condemned and suppressed, "it has become an obsession, a disease, a perversion," says the Acharya, and advises us to "accept sex with joy. Acknowledge its sacredness... When a man approaches his wife he should have a sacred feeling, as if he were going to a temple. And when a wife goes to her husband she should be full of reverence one has nearing God. In the moments of sex, lovers pass through coitus, and that stage is very near to the temple of God, to where he is manifest in creative formlessness." He conjectures that man had his first glimpse of *samadhi* during sexual intercourse culminating in a climax when the mind becomes empty of thoughts. Thus *vishyanand* (bliss of coitus) and *Brahmand* (bliss of union with God) are much the same; one is ephemeral, the other eternal.

Not all sexual intercourse is experience of divinity. For that you have to first get rid of your ego — "Unless I dissolve myself, how can the other unite with me?" he asks. Love always gives; the ego is ever the grabber; love is motiveless, the ego always motivated; the ego only understands the language of taking; the language of giving is love. The second condition to be fulfilled is the feeling of timelessness. "In orgasm, the sense of time is nonexistent. There is no past, no future, there is only the present moment."

The Acharya has some practical suggestions to overcome an unhealthy obsession with sexuality. Children should be allowed to remain nude as much as possible in the home so that they do not develop prurient curiosity in private organs. They should also be taught to meditate (on what, he does not say) in silence for at least one hour every day. They should be taught what sex is all about before they are old enough to engage in it. He writes, "Sex is the most mysterious, most profound, most precious and, at the same time, the most accursed subject; and we are in total darkness about it. We never pay our attention to this important phenomenon. A man goes through the routine of coitus throughout his life, but he does not know what it is."

The Acharya, who claims to have had sexual fulfilment in his previous life which cleared his mind of sexuality for his present incarnation and those to come, tells how to get the best out of coitus. Most of us are used to quickies which end in frustration and incite us to have more of the same thing. Coitus, he tells us, must be prolonged as much as possible. In the way of techniques he suggests slowing down one's breathing and focusing awareness to a point between the eyes, the seat of the *agnichakra.* If you can prolong intercourse to one hour, you need not think of sex for the rest of your life; if you can prolong to three hours, you will be liberated from sexuality for your lives to come. A third essential condition is that you should approach sex with reverence. "Give sex a sacred status in your life," he says. "At the time of coitus we are close to God."

The Acharya tells us the sculptors of erotica on the temples of Konark, Khajuraho and Puri had the right

approach to sex. We should have such temples all over India. *Tantriks* were also on the right path; preachers of religious dogma suppressed them. He concludes: The journey to Kama is also the journey to Rama. "The journey to lust is also the journey to light. The tremendous attraction for sex is also the search for the sublime."

It is difficult to decide how seriously one can take Rajneesh. As anything else he writes, his *From Sex to Super-Consciousness* is extremely readable.

— *Sunday*, August, 1989

# *Black-out into Ecstasy*

We were talking about mystic experience. Not only those experienced by mystics in states of religious exaltation but those of common mortals. I spoke of those I was familiar with: physical and cerebral. Most normal males and females are, or should be, familiar with the feeling of swooning into ecstasy when achieving the climactic during sexual intercourse. Louis MacNiece described it as when "time was away and somewhere else". Shelley depicts the same in memorable verse:

> A mist was spread, the sickness of a deep
> And speechless swoon of joy, as night befell
> Two disunited spirits when they leap
> In union from this earth's obscene fading sleep

Likewise music, singing and dancing can transport one from the earth into an ethereal sphere. Maulana Room's dervishes whirl round and round and collapse into a trance. The word in Urdu is *haal.* Keats had a similar experience when he heard the nightingale on a full moonlit night. He felt as if he had drunk hemlock and sunk lethewards:

"Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful death
Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever it seems rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth my soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!"

It was then that Keats felt as if magic casements opened to give visions of vast, turbulent seas, "in faery lands folorn".

My contribution to mystic experiences of mortals ended there. Catherine Clement who has gone into the subject more fully had a lot more to say, most of it beyond my comprehension. She gave me her latest publication *La syncope — philosophic de ravissement* (Grasset), which was released in Paris last month. My French is not upto reading philosophical dissertations. I did not know what the word *Syncope* meant. The closest my French dictionary came to was blackout. I got Catherine to make me a synopsis of it in English. It got me even more confused. Then I asked Mohanjeet Grewal who lives in Paris and is bilingual to read the book and tell me about it. All she could do was to tell me that it dealt with European and Indian thinking on the phenomenon of ecstasy and had lots of *histoires* (anecdotes) to illustrate the points she made.

First, a few words to introduce Catherine Clement. She is a pretty, young (51 looks 31) *salwar-kameez* wearing. Parisienne author of over 15 books including one on Mahatma Gandhi. She was the youngest person ever to have become a full professor at the Sorbonne. She

developed an obsession for India, the *bhakti* cult and *tantrism;* she visited the country many times to do her research. In her book, she doesn't say much about herself except that between 1982-87 she was engaged in the exchange of cultural programmes between India and France. In the last of the five lines of self-introduction, there is a cryptic mention of her address — "living in the French embassy in New Delhi". She happens to be Her Excellency, the wife of the French ambassador to India.

According to Clement. *Syncope* can be of four kinds: physiological like fainting or produced by music and poetry. She adds a fourth category, linguistic e.g. shortening of a word like *Mademoiselle* to *Mam'selle.* (This is beyond my comprehension). "In all these cases," she writes, "a little time is missing the term *Syncope* therefore refers to every absence of consciousness."

While European thinkers till the 19th century battled against black-outs of the mind, Indians cultivated them by controlling their breathing and attaining *samadhi* — the ultimate aim of *hatha yoga.* The opposing attitudes are manifested in the opposite views on amorous relationships. "Love at first sight" was accepted by Europeans but rejected by Indians except, when a searcher for truth chances upon the guru he has been looking for. We have an example of the two-in-one with Ramakrishna Parmahansa.

"There are several technical ways of reaching ecstasy as there are of getting an orgasm," writes Clement, "Ecstasy or orgasm are the same for everybody."

I remain as confused as ever.

— *Sunday*, July, 1990

# *Whoring and the Law*

What shopping is to the *shrimati* when she goes abroad, whoring is to the *shriman* as he steps out of his country: they are on the top of their list of priorities. Shopping abroad does not require any expertise as exotic merchandise is plentiful, attractively displayed and prices fixed. Whoring on the other hand needs nerve. There is the risk of being found out and losing respectability; there is the problem of communication and danger of catching venereal disease. Nevertheless, the Indian male is like Pavlov's dog which, as soon as a bone is suggested, begins to salivate in the mouth. No sooner does he have his passport, visa and air-ticket in his pocket, he feels stirrings in his middle. Since seduction requires time and sophistication, it is bordellos and streetwalkers he patronises. I have observed this phenomenon over the years I lived in England, France, the United States and Canada and had to entertain visiting celebrities. What makes them compulsive whoremongers?

Rich material was available on the subject in English tabloids throughout the first week of last month. On the

evening of the 3rd of October, Sir Allen Green, director of public prosecutions, was caught driving his car slowly along the kerb of a street near King's Cross railway station, park it and approach a prostitute standing on the side. A policeman arrived on the scene, took down his name and number of his car. He was charged under the Sexual Offences Act of 1985. It is ironical that the law was intended to protect respectable women from being pestered by men who mistook them for prostitutes. Normally, the police let offenders off with a warning or a small fine. But Sir Allen had been noticed doing this on earlier occasions; the constable on duty this time was less accommodating. So, the man whose main function was to initiate criminal prosecutions against other people, was faced with the prospect of being in the dock himself. The next morning he publicly announced his resignation with the admission that he "bitterly regretted" his action. Sir Allen Green was a highly respected member of the Bar, has an attractive Swedish wife and two grownup children. Earlier this year, the family was received by the Queen in Buckingham Palace.

Sir Allen is by no means the first celebrity to be caught soliciting prostitutes in the street. William Gladstone, Prime Minister of England , was known to have spent a tenth of his income and four nights of every week looking for whores to take to bed. Lord Wigg, security adviser of Wilson's Labour government, was prosecuted in 1976 for accosting prostitutes in the West End of London. He was acquitted but his career came to an end. There are many other cases of 'political, sporting and social celebrities, who ruined their lives by being indiscreet in their whore-hunting.

In England prostitution is not and an offence but soliciting prostitutes on the road is. A well-known psychoanalyst of London explains the lure that a streetwalker has for men in high places as a form of escapism. "The greater the risk, the more attractive the activity. What these people are doing is escaping from tension and stress," he says. "Absolute boloney!" say I. Stress and escapism have little to do with men's compulsive desire for variety in sex. For them, it is the spice of life. Those who have self-confidence, seduce amateurs, those who have not, buy services of professionals. In this matter, men are no different from rats. Rat-watchers have observed that a new female rat introduced to a male immediately enhances it sex potential and it goes at it like a randy bridgeroom. So do men. After a honeymoon there is a sudden decline in their performance, it is restored when another female becomes accessible. It has been aptly described as the Columbus effect — the itch to discover. The more forbidden the fruit the sweeter it tastes. If you have to maintain a facade of respectability, the itch to take risks and defy taboos imposed by social norms becomes unbearably hard. Hence, instead of ringing up girls who advertise themselves in telephone booth and sleazy tabloids, or asking the room bearer to send up a girl (our hotels of all astral denominations provide this service), you go to a red-light area and expose yourself to the danger of being nabbed by the police.

It is time we abrogated the law against prostitution. Prostitutes have fulfilled a necessary social function since time immemorial. You clear them out of red light districts and they move next door in the most select residential

areas. The only obligation society has is to prevent unwilling, minor girls being sold into the trade and ensure regular medical check-ups to prevent the spread of venereal diseases. Our police must be prevented from harassing these unfortunate women, making money off them, wasting their time raiding brothels. They never seems to catch and punish the men who patronise them, only the call-girls and prostitutes.

— *Sunday*, November, 1991

# *The Male Venom*

Men have abused women from the day Eve was born out of Adam's rib. They have created myths about their being low in intelligence, poor in physique, devious in their ways and totally unreliable and repeated them *ad nauseam* so long that most women accepted them to be true and developed an inferiority complex. It was only in the last century that women began to question assumptions of male superiority, claimed equal rights and hit back with vigour at their denigrators as male chauvinist pigs. While men have conceded that women are every bit as good as they in all fields of activity, women have not forgiven them for the centuries of humiliation they had to suffer and constantly remind them of their past misdeeds.

The latest exercise in female vendetta is *In Her Master's Voice: Five Thousand Years of Put-downs and pin-ups* (Penguin-Viking). The compilation has been made by Tama Stair, a New York-based journalist and director of numerous advertising agencies. She has no right to grieve against sexual discrimination but has nevertheless thought it best to keep men reminded how nasty and brutish their male

ancestors had been to women on her mother's side. She quotes rustic proverbs, sacred texts, founders of religions like Zarathustra, the Buddha and Martin Luther, philosophers like Aristotle, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung down to oafs like Adolf Hitler to make men of the present generation squirm at their forefathers' pronouncements against women.

There is a Punjabi proverb that women's brains are located in the heels of their feet. A German parallel runs "a woman has the form of an angel, the heart of a serpent, and the mind of an ass". Till modern times a woman was regarded as her husband's property to be treated or disposed of as he willed. Shakespeare in *The Taming of the Shrew* summed it up thus:

*I will be the master of what is mine own:*
*She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,*
*My household stuff, my field, my barn,*
*My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything.*

Even Leo Tolstoy, the enlightened philosopher-writer, had a very low opinion of female morality. "So-called decent women are different from whores mainly on that whores are less dishonest," he wrote. Hindu sages believed that "they who are full of sin beget daughters". Milton was not far away in subscribing to the same kind of belief:

...Oh! why did God,
Creator wise, that people's highest Heaven
With Spirits Masculine, create at last
This noveltie on Earth this fair defect of Nature, (Woman)...?

Women were believed to have an insatiable appetite for sex. Sheikh Omar En-Nefzawi in his classic *The Perfumed Garden* has this episode:

"Long ago there lived a woman named Moarbeda, a noted philosopher who was reputed to be the wisest person of her time. It is recorded that one day some questions were put to her, and these were some of her replies:

*"In what part of woman's body does her mind reside?"*

*"Between her thighs."*

*"And in what place does she experience her greatest pleasure?"*

*"The same."*

*"And what is a woman's religion?"*

*"Her vulva."*

*"And with what part of herself does she love and hate?"*

*"The same ... We give our vulva to the man we love and refuse it to the man we hate."*

Although we men at times talk of the chastity of women, deep down we fear their sexuality. There is a Sanskrit proverb which says: "In the absence of men all women are chaste." There are innumerable references in English literature to women never saying no to sex and even when they say "no" they mean "yes". A passage in the Ramayana asserts that even married women are not immune to sexual temptation:

"Women that are of good family, beautiful and well married do not stay within the moral bounds. This is the failing in women ... There is not a man they would not go to — be he old or young, handsome or ugly — for they think to themselves only: 'He is a man', and want to enjoy

him ... Even those women who are held in high esteem, watched over and loved, they too, given the chance, will fasten even unto hunchbacks, the blind, simpletons, dwarfs, and cripples ... And when women cannot come on to a man at all, they even fall lustfully on one another, for they will never be true to their husbands..."

"The fire has never too many logs, the great sea never too many rivers, death has never too many beings of all kinds, and lovely-eyed woman has never too many men. This, O divine Rishi, is the secret of all women. So soon as a woman sees a handsome man, her vulva becomes moist ... Not the richest enjoyment of their wishes, not ornaments, nor protection and home do they hold in such esteem as satisfaction and pleasure in love."

"The god of death, the wind, the underworld, the ever burning entrance to hell, the knife-edge, poison, serpent, and fire — women are all of these in one."

"Ever since the five elements have been, and the worlds have been made, ever since men and women were made — ever since then, these faults have been in women."

Bharthruhari asserted that "women have one man in their hearts, another in their words and still another in their arms". A Polish proverb put it more bluntly: "Water, fire and women will never say 'enough'." And a Chinese proverb held, "When a woman's lips say 'it is enough', she looks at you with her eyes and they say 'again'." Sheikh Omar of *The Perfumed Garden* waxes on the theme:

*Men, hear my words about woman,*
*Her lust is writ between her eyes.*
*Heed not her words, though she be the Sultan's daughter;*

*Her malice is infinite ...*
*Men, beware and delay the love of woman,*
*Never say 'I love you'*
*Or 'This is my companion.'*
*She loves you only while you're thrusting—*
*That kind of love can't last.*
*Lying on her breast, you love her...*
*Fool! In the morning she'll call you a pig!*
*And this too is something nobody questions:*
*Wives entertain slaves in the husband's bed.*
*Trust a woman and lose your head!*

Women are not reliable, asserts Aby Nuwas (800 AD):

*Rely not on women, trust not in their hearts;*
*Their faith is found in their private parts.*

The French existentialist philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, could be unbelievably crude in his references to female sexuality:

"The obscenity of the feminine sex is that of everything which 'gapes open'. It is an *appeal to being* as all holes are. In herself woman appeals to a strange flesh which is to transform her into a fullness of being by penetration and dissolution ... beyond any doubt, her sex is a mouth and a voracious mouth which devours the penis — a fact which can easily lead to the idea of castration. The amorous act is the castration of the man: but this is above all because sex is a hole."

In short, no lady can ever be a gentleman because when she is bad she is unbelievably bad. Wrote James Barrie:

*Oh the gladness of her gladness when she's glad,*
*And the sadness of her sadness when she's sad;*

*But the gladness of her gladness,*
*And the sadness of her sadness,*
*Are as nothing, Charles,*
*To the badness of her badness when she's bad.*

That's the sentiment behind Kipling's oft-quoted line "the female of the species is deadlier than the male".

Are women more jealous and envious than males? Freud believed they are. As the women's lib movement gathered force, male resentment got stronger. In a interview Even Knievel, an American, said: "Women's libbers are a pain in the ass. I treat women the way I always did, except I treat women's libbers different: if catch one, I try and screw her a little harder."

A logical consequence of the deeply ingrained suspicion against woman is the male outlook on the institution of marriage: women trap them into it. "If wives were good, God would have had one," says a Georgian proverb. "Bigamy is having one wife too many. Monogamy is the same," goes a British joke. "The sooner it is ended, the better". "A woman gives a man but two happy days: the day he marries her, and the day he buries her," said Hipponax (6th century BC).

However, it was always conceded that women have fatal attraction for men. A Chinese anecdote narrates: "A young monk, who had been raised from early childhood in the monastery, went one day with his teacher to the city. Seeing women for the first time, he asked his teacher what these might be.

"They are tigers,' replied the teacher, 'and they will eat you up.'

Returning to the monastery, the boy seemed lost in

thought. Finally he spoke: 'If those are tigers, reverend Sir,' he said, 'then I would prefer to be eaten'".

Most men remain convinced that women enjoy being raped. Only three years ago, the Mayor of Missouri pronounced "the difference between rape and seduction is salesmanship".

The birth of a daughter has always been regarded as a calamity. "People ask me how many children I have," said the champion boxer Mohammed Ali, "and I say I have one son and seven mistakes."

Adolf Hitler, as one might have suspected, believed that the women's movement was a Jewish conspiracy. He said: "The message of woman's emancipation is a message discovered solely by the Jewish intellect and its content is stamped with the same spirit." He was not the only one to believe that women had no brains. "Brains are never a handicap to a girl if she hides them under a see-through blouse," wrote an American wit. Therefore educating them "is like pouring honey over a fine Swiss watch. It stops working," said Kurt Vonnegut.

The great wit of the British parliament, Sir Alan Patrick Herbert, wrote of his female preferences:

*I like them fluffy — I know it's bad taste—*
*With fluffy soft looks and a flower at the waist,*
*With golden hair flying, like mist round the moon*
*And lips that seem sighing, "You must kiss me soon",*
*No huffy, or stuffy, not tiny or tall,*
*But fluffy, just fluffy, with no brains at all.*

According to Leo Berg, women express the best through their breasts: "A woman's breast is the organ with which

she is able to express herself most intelligently. It is her language and poetry, her history and her music, her purity and her desire ... The bosoms is the central organ of all female ideas, wishes, and moods." A 17th century English proverb sums it all up: Men have many faults, woman only two:

Everything they say, and everything they do."

— *The Week*, 13 February, 1994

# *No Sex, We are Indians*

No people in the world are more confused in their attitude towards sex than we Indians. Our cherished ideals bear little resemblance with our patterns of sexual behaviour; our fantasies, heavily influenced by our mythology, impinge on our subconscious and add to our confusion because they contradict each other. A land of phallus-yoni worshippers laud the virtues of virginal chastity, renunciation of sex and *Brahmacharya*. As a nation we need to be laid out on the couch of a shrink and subjected to thorough psychiatric analysis. This is precisely what our leading psychiatrist. Sudhir Kakar, has done in his brilliant expose, *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality*. Kakar starts with "Scenes from marriages", using as source material two widely-read novels of recent years, Rajinder Singh Bedi's *Ek Chadar Maili Si* (which I have translated into English as *I Take This Woman*) and Krishna Sobti's *Mitro Marjani*. Bedi's novel revolves round the peasant custom of a younger brother taking the widow of his elder brother under this protection (*Chaddar andaazee*) by a ritual spreading of a sheet over her. In this case it is the

30-year-old Rano, wife of a *tonga* driver, Tiloka, often drunk and violent and mother of three children. Her *devar* (husband's younger brother) is 20-year-old Mangla who Rano had breast-fed when he was a child. When Tiloka is killed in a brawl, Mangla is forced to marry Rano who he had looked upon as his mother. Both are initially revolted by the situation but after a violent quarrel consummate their union with equal vigour. Passion for the *devar* is also the theme of Sobti's famous novel. Both the man, Sardari, and his wife, Mitro are highly spirited and are as often fighting each other as they are copulating. When the husband's sexual prowess begins to wane, a frustrated Mitro finds fulfilment in adulterous intercourse, facilitated by her own mother. Kakar concludes:

"To me *Mitro Marjani* is one of the more explicit renderings of a muted yet extremely powerful theme in Hindu marriages: the cultural unease, indeed, the fear of the wife as a woman, i.e., as a sexual being. More exactly, it is the age-old yet still persisting cultural splitting of the wife into a mother and a whore which underlies the husband-wife relationship and which explains the often contradictory Hindu view of the woman."

The Indian woman as a sexual object is vilely abused. Manu reviled her as lusty, unreliable, unfaithful and with an insatiable appetite for sex.

Kakar goes on to explore how much of the Indian's sexual psyche is manifested in the Indian cinema. He selects the two most popular films, *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* and *Karz* to establish that their success was largely due to the exploitation of traditional themes to become "collective fantasies" and "group daydreams" for the 15 million people

who watch films every day. He rightly observes that "the Indian cinema audience... is the real author of the text of Hindi films". When kissing is forbidden how is it that rape remains a staple feature of Indian films? It is because humiliation of the woman is an integral part of the Indian male's fantasy of love. So we have evolved three kinds of lovers: Majnuns, Krishnas and the latest, Amitabh Bachchan — who is a "good-bad hero neither overtly emotional like Majnun nor boyishly phallic like the Krishna lover. In turn he has bred a new brand of heroine, "a masculine-feminine girl", the Kumari as the tomboy.

The most revealing of Sudhir Kakar's exposes is his analysis of Mahatma Gandhi. Apart from material contained in his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth,* Kakar has had access to letters written by the Bapu to women close to him and who he used (misused) as guinea-pigs to test his vow of celibacy. Gandhi admits that he was a highly sexual and jealous husband. The first trauma was when his father died while he was engaged in sex in the next room. He narrowly missed adulterous intercourse with a prostitute and later an English girl while studying in England. It was during his long sojourn in South Africa while reading Tolstoy that he thought of becoming celibate. He finally took the vow at the age of 37 without bothering to consult his wife. He experimented with brands of vegetarian diet which would lessen the sexual urge and had young girls lie next to him to test the efficacy of his formulae. He subscribed to the traditional Hindu belief that semen was the essence of life; if spilt during intercourse, it was wasted (except when used to fertilise the wife); if channelled upwards (*orjas*) towards the brain it gave man immense power. As

a result, women who willingly participated with him in these experiments became physical and mental wrecks while his Mahatmatic aura gained more splendour.

Sudhir Kakar's thesis is sound scholarship of the highest order. It will take many generations to cleanse our minds of accretions of centuries of irritational beliefs in the sexuality of women before we can treat them as equal partners in what remains the ultimate experience of life.

— *Sunday*, 10 December, 1989

# *Sex in Indian Life*

Many winters ago I happened to be travelling by a night train from Delhi to Bhopal. It was a fast express that made only a few halts at major stations. I found myself in a compartment of five berths: three below and two on the sides above. I had a lower berth, as did the other two passengers who were there before me. The upper berths were reserved in the names of a Professor and Mrs Saxena. Fifteen minutes before the train was due to leave, a party of men and women escorting a bride decked in an ornate sari drawn discreetly across her face, her arms loaded with ivory bangles stopped by our compartment, read the names on the panel and came in. They were dismayed to see the two berths reserved for them were separated by a 15 foot chasm of space. One of the party approached me and asked if I could take one of the upper berths to accommodate the newly married couple. I readily agreed and moved my bedding roll. Another passenger who had the middle berth also moved up on the other upper berth so that the bridal couple could be alongside each other. I heard one of the party stop the

conductor guard and tell him to wake up the pair at a particular junction where the train was to make a brief three-minute halt at 3 a.m.

As the guard blew his whistle and waved his green flag, the party took leave of the bridal pair with much embracing and sobbing. No sooner had the train cleared the platform, the bride blew her nose and uncovered her face. She was a woman in her mid-twenties: pale-skinned, round-faced and wearing thick-lensed glasses. I couldn't see much of her figure but could guess that she would be forever fighting a losing battle against fat. Her groom looked a couple of years older than her ("professor" being a honorific for a junior lecturer) and, like his bride, was sallow faced, corpulent and bespectacled. From the snatches of conversation that I could hear (I was only four feet above them) I gathered that they were total strangers and their marriage had been arranged by relatives and through matrimonial columns of *The Hindustan Times.* They talked of their papajis and mummyjis. Then of their time in college (the halcyon days for most educated Indians) and of their friends: "like a brother to me" or "better than my own real sister." After a while the conversation began to flag; I saw the man's hand resting on his woman's on the window.

The lights were switched off leaving only a nightlight which bathed the compartment in blue. I could not see very much except when the train ran past brightly lit platforms of wayside railway stations.

The couple did not bother to use the middle berth vacated for them and decided to make themselves as comfortable as they could on a four-feet wide wooden

plank. They ignored the presence of other passengers in the small compartment and were totally absorbed in getting to know each other. Such was their impatience that they did not find time to change into more comfortable clothes. They drew a quilt over themselves and were lost to the world.

The sari is both a very ornamental as well as a functional dress. Properly draped, it can accentuate the contours of the female form giving a special roundness to buttocks. A well-cut blouse worn with the sari elevates the bosom, and exposes the belly to below the navel. There is no other form of female attire which can both conceal physical shortcomings of the wearer as well as expose what deserves exposure. A fat woman looks less fat in a sari than she would in a dress and a thin woman looks more filled in. At the same time a sari is very functional. All a woman has to do when she wants to urinate or defecate is to lift it to her waist. When required to engage in a quick sexual intercourse, she needs to do no more than draw it up a little and open up her thighs. Apparently this was what Mrs Saxena was called upon to do. I heard a muffled cry "*Hai Ram*" escape her lips and realised that the marriage had been consummated.

The Saxenas did not get up to go to the bathroom to wash themselves but began a repeat performance. This time *they* were less impatient and seemed to be getting more out of their efforts. More than once the quilt slipped off them and I caught a glimpse of the professor's heaving buttocks and his bride's bosoms which he had extricated out of her *choti.* Above the rattle and whish of the speeding train, I heard the girl's whimper and the man's exulting

grunts. They had a third go at each other before peace descended on our compartment. It was then well past the hour of midnight. Thereafter it was only the wail of the engine tearing through the dark night and the snores of my elderly companions that occasionally disturbed our slumbers.

We were rudely disturbed by someone thumping on the door, slapping the window panes and yelling "Get up, get up. It is Sehore. The train will leave in another minute." It was the conductor guard.

I pressed the switch and the compartment was flooded with light. A memorable sight it was! Professor Saxena fast asleep with his buttocks exposed; Mrs Saxena also fast asleep, her mouth wide, breasts bare, lying supine like a battery pinned down on a board. Her hair were scattered on her pillow. Their glasses lay on the floor.

Whatever embarrassment they felt was drowned in the hustle and bustle of getting off the train. We heaved out their beds and suitcases. The professor stumbled out on the cold platform adjusting his flies. She followed him covering her bared bosom with a flap of her sari. As the train began to move, she screamed: one of her earings was missing. The friendly guard brought the train to a halt. All of us went down on our knees scouring the floor. The errant earing was found wedged in a crevice of the seat. We resumed our journey.

"It is love", remarked one of my travelling companions with great understanding. "They are newly married and this was their first night together. All should be forgiven to people in love."

"What kind of love?" I asked in a sarcastic tone. "A few

hours ago they were complete strangers. They haven't the patience to wait till they get home and start having sex without as much as exchanging a word of affection. You call that love?"

"Well," he replied pondering over the episode. "They may not get another chance for some days. There will be his relatives: his mother, sisters, brothers. And lots of religious ceremonies. Youth is impatient and the body has its own demands. Let us say it is the beginning of love."

"It may be the beginning of another family but I don't see where love comes in," I remarked. "I can understand illiterate peasants coupling like the cattle they rear but I cannot understand two educated people: a lecturer in a college and a school teacher so totally lacking in sophistication or sense of privacy as to begin copulating in the presence of three strangers,"

"You have foreign ideas" said the third man dismissing me. "Anyway, it is 3:30 in the morning. Lets get some sleep." He switched off the light and the argument.

The episode stayed in my mind because it vividly illustrated the pattern of the man-woman relationship that exists among the vast majority of Indians. Love, as the word is understood in the West, is known only to a tiny minority of the very westernised living in the half-a-dozen big cities of India who prefer to speak English rather than Indian languages, read only English books, see only Western movies and even dream in English. For the rest, it is something they read about in poems or see on the screen but it is very rarely a personal experience. Arranged marriages are the accepted norm; "love" marriages a rarity. In arranged marriages the parties first make each others

acquaintance physically through the naked exploration of each others bodies and it is only after some of the lust has been drained out of their systems that they get the chance to discover each others minds and personalities. It is only after lust begins to lose its potency and there is no clash of temperaments that the alliance may in later years develop bonds of companionship. But the chances of this happening are bleak. In most cases, they suffer each other till the end of their days.

I have no idea what became of the Saxenas whose nupital consummating I witnessed. It is likely that by now they have produced a small brood of Saxenas. He is probably a full professor teaching romantic poetry and occasionally penning a verse or two to some younger lady professor ("like a sister to me") or to some pig-tailed student ("like my own daughter"). Mrs Saxena probably tries to retain her husband's interest by dog-like devotion, prayer and charms brought from "holy" men. On the rare occasions when the professor mounts her, she has to fantasize about one of his younger colleagues ("exactly like a real brother to me") before she shudders in the throes of an orgasm with the name of God on her lips: "Hai Ram".

The Saxenas are luckier than most Indian couples because they live away from their families and are assured a certain amount of privacy. To most newly married Indian couples, the concept of privacy is as alien as that of love. They rarely get a room to themselves; the bride-wife sleeps with other women members of her husband's family; the husband shares his *charpoy* lined alongside his father's and brothers'. Occasionally, the mother-in-law, anxious to acquire a grandson will contrive a meeting between her son

and his wife. The most common technique is to get her to take a tumbler of milk to the lad when other male members are elsewhere. The lad grabs the chance for the "quickie". Hardly ever do the couple get enough time for a prolonged and satisfying bout of intercourse. Most Indian men are not even aware that women also have orgasms; most Indian women share this ignorance because although they go from one pregnancy to another, they have no idea that sex can be pleasurable. This is a sad commentary on the people of a country which produced the most widely read treatise on the art of sex, *Kama Sutra* and elevated the act of sex to spiritual sublimity by explicit depictions on its temples.

# LOVE & LUST

# *On Love, Lust and Four-Letter Words*

I was under the impression that all the four-letter words dealing with emotions ranging from love to fornication were introduced into India by the British. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that it is the other way round. The English got them from the Sanskrit and then brought them back to India. Thus love, the modern version of the old English *lufa,"* was a derivation of the Sanskrit *lobh,* to desire. Even more startling is the genesis of the commonest four-letter word now international currency for the expression of lust. Believe it or not, the Europeans got it from our ancients. The Sanskrit word *bhoga* which infuses a sacramental tone into the act of sex was taken over by the Latin *facere,* to do, then vulgarised by the English and reintroduced to the land of its birth. Why the relationship between the original Sanskrit and its English derivative is not immediately noticeable is because neither Sanskrit nor any of our other languages have the equivalent of the letter F in their alphabet. The best we can do is to aspirate our Bs and Ps. Do you get me?

My information on the etymology of love comes from

the introduction—a singularly soulless introduction by John Stalworthy—to the *Penguin Book of Love Poetry.* His selection is disappointing; his division of the different aspects of love incomprehensible. What can one make of chapters on love divided into intimations, declarations, persuasions, celebeations, aberrations, seperations, dissolutions and reverberations? And what excuse is there to omit Oriental poets from an anthology of love poetry? Some of the most memorable lines on love have been written by Orientals. Said Jami, the 15th-century Sufi mystic: "The heart which is exempt from the sickness of love is not a heart; the body deprived of the grief of love is only lemon and water. It is the amorous disquietude which gives to the universe its eternal movement, it is the dizziness of love which makes the spheres turn round."

To the West, love's paradigm is man's perpetual quest for Helen. In this part of the world the same is expressed in the immortal tale of Leila and Majnun. Majnun was seen one day sifting sand with his hands. "What do you seek in the grains of sand?" someone asked him. "I seek Leila," replied Majnun. "And do you expect to find Leila in this way? Would a woman of such peerless beauty be found in this dust?" he was asked again. "I seek Leila everywhere," replied Majnun. "I seek her everywhere in the hope of finding her somewhere some day."

# *Oodles of Love*

During one of my periodic bouts with *The Times* (London) crossword puzzles, my eye fell on St. Valentine messages printed alongside. There were six full columns with almost a hundred professions of love in each column. I was disappointed to find what little progress lovers had made in expressing their affection. More than 500 messages said no more than the three words, I love you, or repeated the old doggerel: "Roses are red, violets are blue, dizzie darling, I love you." A fair proportion could not even do that and exhausted themselves in a series of Xs presumably expressing desire for labial contact. There were many which were totally inane, to wit: *"Hee hee tee hee hee turn tee,* did I say I love you?" And: "Heffalumpus for breakfast, Heffalumpus for tea, Heffalumpus for ever, when this week you marry me." Lots use private language: "Baby bear loves horrid hedgepig."

Indian emigrants have also found entree in England's love letters. One addressed to a Shrimati reads: "You sweet *gulabjamun* of my most delectable dreams!" And this from a Shriman: "Adorable Penny! If you don't know

what to do, lie back and think of your Indian." Many languages are used, even Persian: *Ba hazaran Boseh* (with a thousand kisses).

A new phenomenon is intrusion of lust in expressing love: "You stimulating lovable troll." And this to "Adorabella who is peerlessly precious, deliciously desirable and wantonly worshipful". Then there is a lady with the pseudonym Nancy Thunderthighs to whom passion is conveyed as follows: "A bee likes to suck a flower; you are my flower but I am no bee. I like to..."

When it comes to borrowing other people's flowers, it is still Shakespeare or Browning. Some were however new to me.

Love, the tolling of a bell
*Love, the mesmer of your spell*
*Love blind, seldom kind*
*Love fickle, sharp as sickle*
*Love jealous, zealous*
*Love frailty and fealty*

Who said: "My love for you is like a pineapple, sweet, rare and indefinable?" And who wrote: "Love for you is even more beautiful than the call of the bull moose?" The only entry which caught my fancy was: "Thou art fairer than the evening's air, clad in the beauty of a thousand stars."

I have my own personal anthology of this *genre* of poetry. There is much Shakesperiana ranging from "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" Othello's explosion on receiving Desdemona: "If after every tempest come such calms... my soul hath her content so absolute that not another comfort like to this succeeds in unknown

fate." Recent additions to my repertoire are lines from Donne:

> *All other things to their destruction draw,*
> *Only our love hath no decay;*
> *This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday;*
> *Running, it never runs from us away,*
> *But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.*

At one time my favourite used to be Dowson's *Cynara* with its nostalgic reminder of faithfulness in his own fashion "when the feast is finished and the lamps expire, then falls thy shadow Cynara! The night is thine. And I am desolate and sick of an old passion". I have now stumbled upon something better:

> *Words are so weak*
> *When love hath been so strong*
> *Let silence speak*
> *Life is a little while, and love is long;*
> *And after harvest a long time to sleep*
> *A time to sow and reap,*
> *But words are weak.*

—*The Illustrated Weekly of India,* May 1978

# *Lover's Revenge*

The way lovers lodge protests against their sweethearts' indifference varies from country to country. In India most prefer to punish themselves by going off food, going unshaven and unkempt, burning the midnight oil, sighing and composing love lyrics on the cruelty of his loved one. I knew a fellow who everytime his ladylove refused to entertain him would lie down in the middle of the road and cause a traffic jam. The Anglo-Saxons do not normally go in for this form of self-flagellation and instead prefer to punish the unresponsive object of their passions. A bizarre case recently came up in an English court. A young man whose one-time mistress went off and married another man tried to forget her by taking other mistresses. But it did not work and he tried to persuade his first love to abandon her husband and children to come back to him. She refused and went off with her family to a sea-side resort. In their absence the chagrined lover dropped 20 rats through the letter-slit in the entrance door of her apartment and took away her cat. By the time the family returned, the rats had multiplied, eaten up her sofas,

curtains, even the wiring of her washing machine and spilled over to the neighbours' houses. It was the neighbours who reported the matter to the pest control and summoned the family back to its lodgings. In the criminal suit that followed, the aggrieved lady was unable to prove that her ex-lover had in fact deposited the rats in her house. All she could find in support of her story was the man's current mistress's admission that the man had a kink about rodents, hated cats and that she had advised the ex-mistress to block the letter-slit in the door with a cardboard.

However when it comes to re-animating the dead emotions of mistress, neither the oriental nor the occidental approach is likely to yield results. Love is like life; once switched off nothing will bring it back.

— *New Delhi,* April 1979

# *What is Love?*

It is easier to say what it is *not* than what it is. Even after you have excluded emotions that have nothing to do with it, you are up against many kinds of love which have little in common. You may love your god, your country and your parents but you'll sense that there is a qualitative difference between these kinds of love and the love that envelops a man and a woman of somewhat the same age and capable of sexual intercourse. Dorothy Tennov, an American psychiatrist, has defined this kind of love as "an obsessive, all-embracing passion for another person that strikes seemingly from nowhere and makes life a hell of uncertainty, punctuated by brief moments of ecstasy". She has given this brand of man-woman fixation the name "limerance".

Tennov's definition of love is as good as I have seen anywhere but it does not explain why this "obsessive, all-embracing passion" erupts, why it loses intensity and why it often turns to sour hate.

How and why two people of the opposite sexes are attracted to each other to the exclusion of others has never

been fully explored. The urge is without doubt physical because it usually manifests itself on the approach to puberty. It is also often entirely a yearning of the body without any mental or emotional overtones. Both males and females pass through such a period when compulsions of the body are so explosive that they will seek their fulfilment through the most readily available persons without the slightest affection for them. This is lust not love. Love is more subtle than lust and while lust can be fulfilled by expending the lust, love has more frustration than fulfilment.

Why two people fall in love with each other can only be explained by probing their psyches. It is believed that most people fall in love with people very much like themselves. This has been confirmed by computer matings. If it is so, we can presume that there is a strong element of narcissism in a person's choice. It has been noticed that many couples in love resemble each other like brother and sister. But, as often, a couple totally unlike each other in their physical makeup are strongly drawn towards each other. This may be explained as the negative aspect of narcissism.

It is apparent, that love is initially stirred by physical attraction and is born in the eye. It is on the physical that the mental and emotional relationship is built. Even the emotional is frequently reinforced by appeals which are essentially physical: "You are the most beautiful person in the world" etc. Love is not man's quest for an idealised Helen; it is elevating a girl who is available to Hellenistic heights. That is why men do not roam the world looking for the girl of their dreams but weave them round the girl

next door. She is there, others are not. This phenomenon has been given the label "equity": in love people get what they deserve. However idealised the love may become, its consummation is in the act of sex. As Donne put it in his earthy way:

*Who ever loves, if he do not propose*
*The right true end of love, he's one that goes*
*To sea for nothing but to make him sick*

The romantic edifice of love has to have sex as its foundation stone. Once that is gone love becomes something else: companionship, friendship. Or whatever else.

The circumstances in which a couple meet each other often compels them to fall in love. The same couple in a different setting might not even notice each other. In one of her novels Rosamund Lehmann narrates how two children who happened to be playing together by the seaside saw a flock of geese swoop down through a misty sky to land on the sea in front of them. When they met again many years later they promptly fell in love because of the mystic experience they had shared in their childhood. I have little doubt that if an Indian mountaineer getting on top of the Everest from the Indian side were to meet a Chinese lass coming up from the other, they would immediately fall in love. And not in the *Hindi-Chini-bhai-bhai* or the *bhai-bahin* way.

American researchers have further discovered that a man in an excitable state is more prone to fall in love than when he is calm and placid. Apparently, excitement causes chemical changes in his blood and brain vessels which make him more receptive to emotional stimuli. High

altitude bring about similar effects. Hence the high incidence of marriage between air hostesses and passengers. The Americans have further established that the traumatic experience of rejection induces hunger for certain types of compensatory diet like chocolate.

Speaking from personal experience I can say that all this theorising about love is hogwash. People fall in and out of love all the time in all kinds of places and make the most impossible combinations. There is nothing exclusive about love because people can be in love with varying degrees of intensity with many people at the same time. I do not know if other people suffer anguish when they are rejected; I have an exhilerating sense of release.

— *New Delhi,* March 1980

# *Outraged Correspondence*

The number of abusive letter in my mail increases steadily. (A man — though no gentleman, I presume is of the male gender — sends me one every other day addressing me as "Dear Bum".) After telling me what they think of my politics, they proceed to make uncharitable comments on my age and lechery. No doubt I invite most of this by what I write. I am cheered to see that greater men than poor I indulged in the same kind of self-exposure and received the same kind of abusive response. There was the poet, Momin (d. 1851) who put my thoughts in delectable verse over a century ago:

> There was a young man who was famed among
> The lovers, and was for his deeds renowned.
> His name was Momin, faith idolatry,
> The worship of idols being his sole concern,
> No thought he gave to world of religion,
> But cared for lovely ladies' charm alone.
> He spent his time in leisure, love, and joy,
> Lost in life's pleasures night and day;

For ever happy, gay, and drunk on hope,
For ever smiling like an open bud;
Green like the flask of wine laughing when
The sparkling liquid is poured into the cup;

Then there was the Lucknowi, Nasikh, who wanted his fleshy desire to be inscribed on his epitaph:

I am a lover of breasts
Like pomegranates;
Plant then no other trees
On my grave but these.

The Urdu poets were certainly more imaginative than I. To wit Atish:

Whenever a bubble
By another bubble rose,
I thought of her brassiere
Of finest gauze.

Now I await another crop of outraged correspondence. Don't let me down.

— *New Delhi,* April 1980

# *Love is Dead*

Words of wisdom appear in the oddest of places. The following I found inscribed on a wall of a urinal of the transit lounge of Los Angeles airport where I was last week: "Love is basically give and take — as much as you can give and as much as I can take."

I ponder over them while emptying my bladder. Surely, this means love is dead: love is giving all you have without expecting any thing in return. Love is its own reward. No longer true. No sooner love is institutionalised into marriage or turned into a lover-mistress relationship, it is devalued into a contract between the two parties: spouses and lovers become partners as in business and thereafter business mores govern their relationship. Each tries to extract as much as he or she can and give as little in return as possible. They develop what is aptly described as a "ledger psychology" balancing what they've given against what they have received with a view to making a net profit for themselves. Innumerable examples of how what was once a relationship based on love degenerated into a business association are available, the most scandalous being from

the United States. Rita, wife of Congressman John Jenrette, when their marriage broke down, sold intimate details of their love life to *Playboy* magazine and a television network. Not to be outdone her husband filed a suit asking for a share of the money his ex-wife made out of the exposure of what had once been their joint love life. Marilyn Barnett, longtime lesbian partner of the tennis champion Billie Jean King, sued Billie for "galimony" when Billie let her down by marrying a man. Having failed in her suit Marilyn offered Billie's love letters to her for sale.

Psychologists believe that love has fallen victim to the changed values of society. It was based on trust and now no one trusts anyone any more. Distrust is so widespread that love has withered to lifelessness. Why has trust become so scarce? A society in which corruption is rampant generates a climate of pervasive deception. When you hear of the millions made by politicians and blackmarketeers, you don't feel uneasy fiddling your tax returns, indulging in a little cheating with the customs and smuggle in a camera, watch, a transistor or an extra bottle of whisky. Soon this cheating mentality transfers itself to personal relationships and you think a little lying to your husband, wife or sweetheart will do no harm. You become more self-centred, more reluctant to deny yourself anything and justify it as "I owe it to myself."

Distrust is learnt from experience. When somebody you have trusted lets you down, you begin to distrust everyone else. In America it is a kind of personalised Pearl Harbour experience. All of us have experienced Pearl Harbours in our lives. Unless we overcome these baneful effects, we become suspicious of professions of affection

and prefer fleeting intimacies wherever we can find them without any intention of getting involved. It can be established that most adulterous affairs take place not because the marriage is unhappy but because a safe opportunity to commit adultery becomes irresistible. When an opportunity to have a fling with little danger of discovery presents itself, the vast majority of adults, male and female, will avail of it. The choice before them at the time is between a transitory sense of guilt and letting go the opportunity that may not come again and feeling stupid afterwards. Most people prefer not to feel stupid.

What profound thoughts a full bladder can produce!

— *Sunday*, July, 1983

# *Love and Lust in Germany*

They are the same as anywhere else. Only their manifestations come as a surprise to people whose notions of Germans are based on the Prussian stereotype of robot-like goose-stepping soldiers, relentless toilers, stiff-limbed men and women unable to relax unless well-greased with gallons of beer, unsentimental, frigid men and women who copulate not for pleasure but only to procreate a master race. It is this stereotype which makes it difficult to comprehend the proliferation of blue-cinemas, sex shops, hard core pornography sold in the open, labyrinth of strip tease, live sexshows and brothels in all big German cities... etc. etc... Neither in this or in any other respect are the Germans any different from us.

Savour a few samples from modern German love poetry. Kurt Schwitters who was equally adept at moulding the female form with his hands (he was a sculptor) as he was with his pen exploded with physical and emotional passion for his sweetheart, Anna Bloom: "O you beloved of my twenty-seven senses, I love you — you, yours, you to you, I you, you me — we? That incidentally belong here who

are you uncounted female?... Anna Bloom(.') Anna, Anna, A-n-n-a I trickle your name. Your name drops like soft beef-dripping."

Stefan George was a little more controlled in his emotions: "You are my wish and my thought, I breathe you with every draught, I kiss you with every fragrance."

Since fate often brings together people who had no intention of falling in love with each other, Christian Morgenstern described their advent as two parallel lines heading for infinity: "Two souls straight as a die and from a respectable home. They did not want to intersect until their death, this was their secret pride and joy. But when they had been travelling side by side for ten light years, the lovely pair no longer felt at all earthbound. Were they still parallel lines? They did not know themselves — together they simply flowed like two souls through eternal light."

Ilse Molzalm, as would become a woman, happily plays the second fiddle to her beloved: "Whenever I write a word, you hold the pen. You are incessantly within me, O what grief you have demanded of me, my far away love." And seeks to find fulfilment in annihilation: "Once again I seek the hour when the falcon, released from your hand, knocked against my breast, with trembling wings, and in it my eye recognised you. We must continue to give each other what we did not find we thought ourselves — continue to love, continue to torment each other, till the last light shines on us."

Gottfried Benn summed up the dilemma of lust and love in his poem *Fragmente:* "Crises of expression and attacks of eroticism: that is the man of today, inside a

vacuum, the continuity of the personality is preserved by his suits which last ten years if the material is good."

— *Sunday*, November, 1983

# *Love and Lust*

During my first year at college in England, the Regent Park Zoo arranged the first ever display of creatures which are best studied at night. The centre of attraction was a grassy mound on which thousand of glowworms had been assembled. It was a spectacular sight: a mini-mountain aglow with slowly moving iridescent green dots. There was a crowd round this enclosure. As I tried to muscle my way to the front, I was gently pushed aside by a keeper to make way for celebrities. I recognised one of them, the scientist, Sir Julian Huxley, who was a professor in my college. The other a nondescript, podgy middle-sized man looked vaguely familiar, I had seen his photographs in the papers. He turned out to be H.G. Wells.

A couple of years later later Professor G.S. Marvin with whom I lodged, took me to have tea with H.G. Well's son who lived close by in a lovely, little cottage through which ran a stream. I spoke enthusiastically about having met his father. He quickly changed the subject. Professor Marvin later admonished me for the *faux pas.* Anthony was H.G. Well's illegitimate son through Rebecca West and

hated both his parents. His mother he regarded with unconcealed contempt. After he migrated to the United States he wrote his autobiography. Although Rebecca prevented its sales in England, I was able to lay my hands on a smuggled copy. I was amazed at Anthony's portrayal of her as an insensitive, selfish and self-centred bitch. He was far more understanding of his father.

Almost 30 years later I met Rebecca West at a writers' conference in Edinburgh. She was a strikingly handsome woman in her Sixties with regal manners and a waspish tongue. I had greatly admired her reporting of the Nazi trials and having met her ex-love and bastard son, was curious to meet her. I was able to extract an invitation to lunch. She subsequently cancelled it on the excuse that her husband was unwell.

Now we have the great man's own version of his affairs (*H.G. Wells in Love*). Some chapters from the book have been published in Indian papers but no one has bothered to analyse Wells' views on love and lust. What made Wells a compulsive fornicator? After reading his confessions I am convinced he was never in love with anyone except himself. He calls it the lover-shadow which never leaves a man. When he feels the urge for lust he takes what is available. In a remarkably candid admission to Charlie Chaplin, he said: "There comes a moment in the day when you have written your pages in the morning, attended to your correspondence in the afternoon and have nothing further to do. Then comes that hour when you are bored, that's the time for sex."

His first marriage ended within a year with his eloping with the woman who became his second wife. She did not

particularly relish the kind of no-holds-barred sex that Wells was after. (He boasts of having broken two beds by his vigorous performance.) For a while he picked up with a photo-assistant, "a cheerfully amoral and already experienced young woman." Then followed a succession of blue-stockings with literary pretensions including a young Australian who came to see him in her raincoat with nothing beneath it. Some like Rebecca whom he named "panther" because of her voracious appetite for sex, became pregnant (on the second encounter) and had to be taken care of in a separate establishment, others persuaded to abort and then got rid of. He admits that he developed a taste for "free, ambitious, self-reliant women who would mate with me and go their way." At times Wells had three mistresses installed in different cities and had to use all his stamina to keep them satisfied and all his cunning to prevent them running into each other. Wells confessed to Somerset Maugham "the need to satisfy these (sexual instincts) had nothing to do with love." He suffered no sense of guilt: "I never get the slightest regret out of any of my sexual irregularities. They were amusing and refreshing and I wish there had been more of them." One wonders why he could not satisfy his lust by simply going to prostitutes. In the long run it would have been cheaper and taken less toll of his nerves and time. It is evident that in his pursuit of women (he was more pursued than pursuing), Wells wanted love and admiration from his women without feeling the slightest obligation to give in return anything more than lust.

Wells makes himself out into a randy he-goat. He was nothing of the sort. Many men (and women) go through

their lives with as many if not more affairs but take great pains to conceal their peccadiloes. In this matter there is not much difference between the sexes. In short when it comes to human relationship, there is no such thing as "love till death do us part." A new lover proves more lethal to an old love than the old lovers' demise.

— *Sunday*, December, 1984

# *On Loving Doctors*

Juliet Lowell, author of *Dear Doctor* is of the opinion that when it comes to professions most women fall for doctors rather than lawyers, engineers, politicians, professors, civil servants — or whatever. She confesses that she cannot pass the brass plate of a doctor's office "without feeling like a fireman at the clang of an alarm." She has done quite a bit of doctor-chasing and was once put in her place by one who got fed up with her habit of visiting him "at the drop of a symptom." The learned doctor diagnosed her disease as a case of "chronic eupepsia" When Juliet asked him what she could do about it, the doctor replied; "Lost of things, but I do not recommend any of them." Back home, Juliet consulted her medical dictionary and found that eupepsia meant "good digestion."

In *Dear Doctor* Juliet Lowell also publishes a letter addressed by a lady to Dr Raj Autar Singh of Pherozeshah Mehta Road, Bombay. It runs as follows:

"Dear doctor Sahib,

My husband has been out of the country for nearly a year and now I am pregnant. Can this be done by mail?"

The name of the lady is published in the book but I have decided to withhold it lest it should cause unhappiness in the family. The book is not available in India.

— *Sunday*, December, 1984

# *Love and Matrimony*

There are not many books of prose which I can think of having read with enjoyment more than once. Poetry, yes I get more out of re-reading it than I did the first time. Also some plays like Shakespeare's, Goethe's and C.B. Fry's because large chunks of them are in fact poetic. Prose, generally no. If it is a narration of events as in novels or short stories I seldom read a second time. It may have some nice turns of phrase, some witicisms, some beautiful descriptive passages, but rarely anything more. The only exceptions are a collection of *pensees* or aphorisms which compel one to ponder over them. My two top favourites of this genre are Andre Gide's *Fruits of the Earth* and *The Unquiet Grave* by Palinurus. Gide's work I have often referred to in my columns. I wish to re-introduce Palinurus.

I can't recall when and how I came by my copy of *The Unquiet Grave.* It lay among my books for a couple of decades before I persuaded myself to open it. My reluctance to do so was my being under the impression that it was a work of some ancient Greek dead long before the advent of Christ. Palinurus was a character in Greek mythology,

a sea pilot who drowned in his sleep but recovered after three days only to be murdered by natives of an island where he found shelter. When I read the book, I found in it many references to Pascal, Flaubert, Goethe, Baudelaire, Chamfort and a host of other French, German and English writers. Whose *nom de plume* was Palinurus?

As is my habit, when a book really excites me, I force it on my friends. It never comes back. My heavily underlined copy of *The Unquiet Grave* disappeared, as if for ever. By chance I happened to mention it to my friend Croom-Johnson, then head of the British Council in India. He knew all about it. The real name of the author was Cyril Connolly (1903-1974). He was a product of Eton and Balliol, editor of *Horizon,* columnist, literary critic and author of several books. *The Unquiet Grave* were jottings in his diary kept during World War II when he was in a mood of extreme despair because his marriage had gone on the rocks and he could not get to Paris which he loved above all other cities. He talks about the breakdown in his personal relationships in his first essay:

"There is no pain equal to that which two lovers can inflict on one another. This should be made clear to all who contemplate such a union. The avoidance of this pain is the beginning of wisdom, for it is strong enough to contaminate the rest of our lives: and since it can be minimised by obeying a few simple rules, rules which approximate to Christian marriage, they provide, even to the unbeliever, its *de facto* justification. It is when we begin to hurt those whom we love that the guilt with which we are born becomes intolerable, and since all those whom we love intensely and continuously grow part of us,

and as we hate ourselves in them, so we torture ourselves and them together. The object of loving is a release from love. We achieve this through a series of unfortunate love affairs or, without a death-rattle, through one that is happy.

Complete physical union between two people is the rarest sensation which life can provide — and yet not quite real, for it stops when the telephone rings."

I go along with him but I am not sure if he is right when he says:

> "We love but once, for once only are we perfectly equipped for loving: we may appear to ourselves to be as much in love at other times — so will a day in early September, though it be six hours shorter, seem as hot as one in June. And on how that first true love affair will shape depends the pattern of our lives."

Again I am uneasy with his analysis of marriage. He says:

> "Two fears alternate in marriage, of loneliness and of bondage. The dread of loneliness being keener than the fear of bondage, we get married. For one person who fears being thus tied there are four who dread being set free. Yet the love of liberty is a noble passion and one to which most married people secretly aspire — in moments when they are not neurotically dependent — but by then it is too late; the ox does not become a bull, nor the hen a falcon."

Connolly appears to be hooked on the notion that first love is the real thing and being so, likely to be disastrous.

He also makes a sharp distinction between love and marriage:

"First love is the most worth having, yet the best marriage is often the second, for we should marry only when the desire for freedom be spent; not till then does a man know whether he is the kind who can settle down. The most tragic breakings-up are of those couple who have married young and who have enjoyed seven years of happiness, after which the banked fires of passion and independence explode — and without knowing why, for they still love each other, they set about accomplishing their common destruction."

His conclusion about the end of love will evoke sad memories in the minds of those who have been through the ordeal:

"When a love affair is broken off, the heaviest blow is to the vanity of the one who is left. It is therefore reasonable to assume that, when a love affair is beginning, the greatest source of satisfaction is also to the vanity. The first signs of a mutual attraction will induce even the inconsolable to live in the present."

*Palinurus: The Unquiet Grave* was re-issued by Penguin Books some year ago.

— *Sunday*, March, 1989

# *The Language of Love-I*

Suddenly one morning I noticed the dry branches of *Kachnar* (Bauhenia) trees flanking Subramaniam Bharati Marg flecked with ivory-white blossoms. Further down the road the massive *Semal* (Silk Cotton) was shedding its scarlet waxen flowers. And I knew the short winter had given way to a shorter spring and the long summer months will soon be on us.

Cock sparrows fluff out their wings and strut around their all too eager hens awaiting to be mounted. Green barbets call incessantly and the *koel* clears its throat to proclaim the advent of summer in full-throated cries. It is the same year after year. Birds' language of love has as limited a repertoire of scream, song and twitter as that of humans.

On February 14th was St. Valentine's Day so named after the 3rd century holy man, Valentinus, patron Saint of lovers. On this day lovers proclaim their passions usually in no more than three words: "I love you." The emotion is so strong that thereafter they collapse into inanities and words which have no meaning except to

their sweethearts. All over the English-speaking world, daily papers devote as many pages printing love-messages as ours do on Sundays to matrimonial ads. Blandishments fall into a dull pattern; young men can think of little else besides comparing their girl friends to animals or edibles. Young girls show less interest in delicacies and prefer to compare their beloved males to bigger and furrier denizens of the forest. To wit, male to female in animal terms: my pussy-cat, Squirrel, Dilly Duck, Bunny, Chicky-wicky, Jenny Wren, Piglet, Fit Bitch. Female to male: my Grizzly Bear, Panda, Mountain Lion, Crocodile, Alligator, Hedgehog, Possum. Next to animals in popularity with males are edibles: my Cherrypie, Honeybun, Lollipop. The third in line of preferences are nakedly suggestive: my Sexy Spiderlegs, Sexpot, Bare Muscle, my Bellybutton wants to say hello to yours today. It is odd that traditional love similes and metaphors are out. No roses, no lilies, nor jasmines. Nor nature's countless things of beauty like the moon, or the stars on a moonless night. There are quite a few Indian entries. One I spot every year is in Gujarati to Rashmee: *"akhi donya ma too bahu pyari che."* Another desi bhai offers the Taj Mahal to his *goree chokree.* A Sri Chandi lifts a love-song from a Hindi movie to his gold-complexioned *Chaheti* and signs himself Moochies and Coochies.

It is a pity that we do not have the equivalent of St. Valentine's Day. How our poets would have gone to town describing their loved ones! I forget the name of the poet who I would have quoted on Valentine's Day if I had a sweetheart.

*Dil ko terey tabassum kee yaad yoon aiyee*
*Keh jag magaa utthen jis tarah mandiron mein chiraagh.*
(The memory of your smile is my heart's delight
As brighter twinkle temple lamps at night.)

— *Sunday*, March, 1985

# *The Language of Love-II*

No subject has been more written about in every language known in the world than love. And yet love has eluded definition because it embraces a wide range of emotions which have little in common with each other save passion. A mother's love for her child, the child's for its mother; a man's love for God, his guru and his country are quite distinct from love that envelops men and women and craves for consummation in physical union. It defies differences of age, race, wealth, learning and looks.

In love there is no calculation; no concern with social norms or consequences. "Of all forms of caution," wrote Bertrand Russell, "caution in love is perhaps the most fatal to true happiness."

Love can produce agony and ecstasy, fulfilment and frustrations, uncertainty, anguish and jealousy and dire hate. All these have found expression in prose and poetry.

Everyone who has been in love has his own favourite quotations. I have taken excerpts from Love Letters, an anthology chosen by Antonia Fraser, Love, compiled by Walter De La Mare, The British in Love by Jilly Cooper,

The Body of Love, edited by Derek Stanford and Poems From the Sanskrit translated by John Brough. But most of this article is based on my personal anthology of Urdu (the most persuasive language of seduction), Sanskrit, French and English love poems.

Like most others, I grappled with the notion of love. Having experienced it many times, I pondered over it and finally put down my thoughts on paper. I read this paper at the Montreal Expo in 1967 before a somewhat bewildered and bemused Canadian audience. I started by posing a number of questions and then answering them.

What exactly is this phenomenon called love? How does it emanate? How does it find expression? And how dissolution? Each one of us has his or her own theory based on personal experience and knowledge of others. I have my own. And it is this...

The basic cause which makes us seek the love of another person is because we are extremely lonely. Gertrude Stein called this void inner loneliness. I prefer to describe it as the inner solitude — the feeling of being all alone in the world. At times we feel this solitude with great poignancy and it is almost like physical pain. It can come upon us suddenly and without warning — as in the early hours of the morning. It can be brought on by the wail of a locomotive as it speeds through the black of the night not knowing where it has come from or where it is going; it may be brought on by the sight of a heron — just one — in a vast sky at dusk.

This inner solitude is something of a paradox. At one time it is like an aching void begging to be filled by the warmth of affection of another; at others it becomes a

walled fortress with a notice bearing the warning, "Keep Out". What happens when two people meet can be best illustrated by depicting human beings as a series of concentric circles one inside the other — the innermost circle may be described as the circle of inner solitude. When two people meet and happen to like each other, they invite each other to trespass towards this innermost circle, to share this inner loneliness. The two sets of concentric circles begin to overlap.

In actual life this invitation to trespass is expressed in exposure — baring of oneself — emotionally and physically. "Love desires that its secret be revealed," said Rumi. "If a mirror reflects nothing what use is it?" The ideal equation is, of course, when the two sets of circles completely overlap, when the integration between two human beings is emotionally and physically complete. This ideal equation seldom takes place as in the process of getting to know each other (trespassing towards each other's inner solitudes) conflicts may arise. One may not like the other's political or religious views; one may be irked by the other's mannerisms, dress, body odour, halitosis — just anything. Then there arises the desire to preserve one's inner solitude and the people concerned begin to put up their defences with the notice "Thus far but no further". They may even expel the intruder outwards. To the extent to which a person allows another to trespass towards his or her inner solitude, to that extent he or she emotionally involved or in love with the other. There is no such thing as total, all-consuming love. We are in different stages of love with different people.

Whatever its limitations, whatever whatever its frustrations, love is the greatest the most exhilarating experience of life. Said Jami, the fifteenth century Sufi mystic: "The heart which is exempt from sickness of love is not a heart; the body deprived of the grief of love is only lemon and water. It is amorous disquietude which gives to the universe its eternal movement, it is the dizziness of love which makes the spheres turn around."

To the West love's paradigm is man's perpetual quest for Helen. In the Orient the same is expressed in the immortal tale of Laila and Majnun. Majnun was seen one day sifting sand with his hands. "What do you seek in the grains of sand?" someone asked him. "I seek Laila," replied Majnun. "And do you expect to find Laila in this way? Would a woman of such peerless beauty be found in this dust?" he was asked. "I seek Laila everywhere," replied Majnun. "I seek her everywhere in the hope of finding her somewhere some day."

## How Love is born

Shakespeare was certain that people fell in and out of love through their eyes:

> "Tell me where is fancy bred,
> Or in the heart or in the head?
> How begot how nourished?
> Reply, Reply,
> It is engendered in the eyes,
> With gazing fed; and Fancy dies
> In the cradle where it lies."

An Urdu couplet supports this view:
*Hota hai raaz-i-ishq-o-mohabbat inheen say paash*
*Aankhein zubaan nahin hain, magar bezubaan nahin.*
("The secrets of desire and love are revealed by the eyes
Eyes have no tongue but they are not without speech.")

It did not occur to these poets that blind people also fall in love.

The earliest symptom of being infected by the love bug is to have a compulsive desire to keep repeating the beloved's name. However commonplace the name may be, love gives it a magical quality and one wants to repeat it like a *mantra.* In *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare exploded in sheer joy over his beloved's name, Olivia:

"Make me a willow cabin at your gate
And call upon my soul within the house;
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Holla your name to the reverbrate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air.
Cry out, "Olivia'."

Next to drooling over the name of the beloved comes the desire to praise her looks. For many years my favourite opening tribute used to be Byron's:

"She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes."

Marlowe went one better than Byron:

"Oh thou art fairer than the evening air

Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars."

When in love you cannot think of anything except the Beloved. It becomes an obsession and you cannot concentrate on your work but keep playing, "He loves me, he loves me not."

* * *

Shakespeare was the supreme poet of love in all its manifestations. It would be impossible to abridge his outpouring in one article. In one of his sonnets, which I often quoted when in a state of depression, he writes of the uplifting potential of the beloved:

"When, in disgrace with Fortune and Men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate.
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possest,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising
Haply I think on thee; and then my state,
Like to the Lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at Heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love rememb'red such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with Kings.

Othello's speech when he receives Desdemona as she arrive after a very rough passage on the sea has been my favourite as an expression of fulfilment:

"If after every tempest came such calms,
May the winds blow, till they have wakened death:
Let every labouring bark climb hills of seas
Olympus high; and duck again as low,
As hells from heaven. If it were now to die
Twere now to be most happy. For I fear,
My soul hath her content so absolute,
That not another comfort like to this,
Succeeds in Unknown fate."

The bard was incredibly naive in believing that love between "true minds" was everlasting, eternal.

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments: love is not love
Which alters when alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken
Love's not Time's fool though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his beiding sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved."

The trouble is that at the time one falls in love becomes an idealist and cannot conceive that one may not feel as intensely about the other as one did first. Here we have Mathew Arnold's impassioned pledge to remain ever true:

'Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

Unfortunately it is rare to find people who fall in love only once in their lifetimes and only give up when "death does them part." Most of them are for ever falling in love with other people and hoping that the new involvements would prove more rewarding than the last. To wit Omar Khayyam's lines which married people could quote when engaged in an extra-marital love affair:

"O love, if thou and I could with fate conspire
To change this sorry state of things entire;
Would we not shatter it to bits
And remould it nearer to our hearts desire?"

The latest addition to my personal anthology of love poetry, some of which I found to have lethal charms, I stumbled on re-reading Christopher Fry's plays. Take for instance the following lines in *The Lady's Not for Burning* to express desire to the beloved:

"...And if existence will Molest a man with
beauty, how can he help
Trying to impose on her the boundary
Of his two bare arms?"

I am not quite sure what the following lines mean, but they sound quite profound:

"What is deep, as love is deep, I'll have
Deeply. What is good, as I'll have well."

Love as Complete Surrender

The most memorable lines come from the Bible. Ruth's prayer enshrines all that love can command. "...And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me..."

Not many English poets except Robert Browning accepted such total surrender as expression of love. "All the Latin I know is *amo* — I love," he wrote. He also accepted the traditional role of men being seekers, women the sought:

"Escape me? Never
Beloved!
While I am I, and you are you,
So long as the world contains us both
While the one eludes,
Must the other puruse."

Urdu has many memorable couplets on different facets of love, of which the quest, the indifference and cruelty of the beloved seemed to obsess poets more than fulfilment. For Meer Taqi Meer, the quest was perennal and never-

ending: *Jaisey Naseem, har sehar, teyree hee karoon hoon justajoo/Khan-ba-khaana, dar-ba-dar, shar-ba-shahr, Koo-ba-koo.*

"Like the breeze every morning
I go looking for you
From house to house, door to door
City to city, lane to lane."

There are Agha Hashr Kashmiri's beautiful lines:

*Sab kuchch khuda say maang liya*
*Tujh ko maang kar;*
*Utthay nahin haath mere*
*Is dua kay baad*
"I asked all I could ask for
When I asked for you;
Once my prayer was answered
I did not raise my hands in prayer again."

Having got his heart's desire, the poet expresses his gratitude not to God, the granter of wishes, but to his beloved. To wit Majrooh:

*Mujhey sahal ho gaeen manzilein*
*Yeh havaa kay rukh badal gaye*
*Tera haath haath mein aa gayaa*
*Keh Chiraagh raah mein jal gaye*
"When your hand I took in mine
Lamps along the route burnt bright;
Winds changed course to ease my way
My goal appeared in easy sight."

Then there is Momin's reminder to his unfaithful mistress:

*Voh jo ham mein tum mein qarar thha, tumhen yaad ho key na yaad ho*
*Vahee yaanee vaada nibah kar, tumhein yaad ho keh na yaad ho.*
"The pledge that you and I made together,
You may remember or may have forgot
The vow to remain true to each other,
You may remember or may have forgot"
*Vo jo lutf mujhpe thhey peyshetar,*
*Vo karm ke thha merey haal par*
*Mujhey sab hai yaad zara zara,*
*tumhein yaad ho keh na yaad ho*
"The love that you had for me some time ago,
The concern you had for my lot,
I remember some of it,
You may remember it or may have forgot."

## Love Letters

There are people who instead of looking forward to meeting their beloved want to get away so that they can write love letters to them. After gushings of poetry, the prose of love letters does really sound prosaic. A good example of it, going beyond variations of the "I-love-you" theme is the correspondence Rousseau carried on with Countess Sophie D'Doudetot. In one written in the summer of 1757 AD he says:

"Come Sophie, that I may torture your unjust heart in order that I on my side, may be merciless towards you. Why should I spare you, whilst you rob me of reason, of honour, and life? Why should I allow your days to pass in

peace, you, who make mine unbearable! — Ah, much less cruel would you have been, if you had driven a dagger into my heart, instead of the fateful weapon, which kills me! Look what I was and what I am now; look to what a degree you have abased me. When you deigned to be mine, I was more than a man; since you have driven me from you, I am the least of mortals. I have lost all reason, all understanding, and all courage; in a word, you have taken everything from me!"

Robert Schumann, the composer, enjoyed writing to his wife; sometimes he wrote several letters in the same day. One goes as follows:

"How happy your last letters have made me — those since Christmas Eve! I should like to call you by all the endearing epithets, and yet I can find no lovelier word than the simple word 'dear', but there is a particular way of saying it. My dear one, then I have wept for joy to think that you are mine, and often wonder if I deserve you. One would think that no one man's heart and brain could stand all the things that are crowded into one day. Where do these thousands of thoughts, wishes, sorrows, joys and hopes, come from? Day in, day out, the procession goes on. But how light-hearted I was yesterday and the day before! There shone out of your letters so noble a spirit, such faith, such a wealth of love! What would I not do for love of you, my own Clara!"

Nathaniel Hawthorne could write poetic-prose as well as he wrote poetry:

"Dearest, I wish I had the gift of making rhymes, for me thinks there is poetry in my head and heart since I have

been in love with you. You are a Poem. Of what sort, then? Epic? Mercy on me, no! A sonnet? No; for that is too laboured and artificial. You are a sort of sweet, simple, gay, pathetic ballad, which Nature is singing sometimes with tears, sometimes with smiles, and sometimes with intermingled smiles and tears."

Napoleon Bonaparte known more as a soldier than a man of letters could write touching love letters to Josephine:

"I have not spent a day without loving you. I have not spent a night without embracing you; I have not so much as drunk a single cup of tea without cursing the pride and ambition which force me to remain separated from the moving spirit of my life. In the midst of my duties, whether I am at the head of my army or inspecting the camps, my beloved Josephine stands alone in my heart, occupies my mind, fills my thoughts. It I am moving away from you with the speed of the Rhone torrent, it is only that I may see you again more quickly. If I rise to work in the middle of the night, it is because this may hasten by a matter of days the arrival of my sweet love."

In one of his long letters to Adele Foucher, Victor Hugo explained the nature of human love and the essential role of sex in its fulfilment:

"There is one word, Adele, which we appear until now to have been afraid of using — the word love; nevertheless what I feel for you really is genuine love; the problem is one of knowing whether what you feel for me is also lover…

"When two souls, which have sought each for however long in the throng, have finally found each other, when they have seen that they are matched, are in sympathy and

compatible, in a world, that they are alike, there is then established for ever between them a union, fiery and pure as they themselves are, a union which begins on earth and continues for ever in heaven. This union, is love, true love, such as in truth very dew men can conceive of, that love which is a religion which defies the loved one, whose life comes from devotion and passion, and for which the greatest sacrifices are the sweetest delights...

"The world, Adele, does not comprehend such passions which are the prerogative only of certain beings who are granted happiness like yours or misery like mine. For the world, love is nothing more than a carnal appetite, a vague inclination which indulgence sates and absence destroys...

At this point, however, bear in mind that nothing should be carried to extremes. I am not claiming that our bodies are of no importance in the greatest of bonds. The good Lord has understood that, without physical intimacy, there could never be any intimacy of the soul, because two beings which love one another must to some extent share their thoughts and their deeds. This is one of the reasons why he has created the attraction of one sex for the other, which is the only indication of the divinity of marriage.

## The Love lingo of Sanskrit

There is a lot of finesse in Sanskrit love poetry as well as plenty of earthiness. From the Ramayana we have a lover exulting over the simple fact that he breathes the same air as his beloved:

"Blow, wind, to where my loved one is,
Touch her, and come and touch me soon:

I'll feel her gentle touch through you,
And meet her beauty in the moon.
These things are much for one who loves—
A man can live by them alone—
That she and I breathe the same air,
And that the earth we tread is one."

Bhartrhari admitted that:
"The clear bright flame of man's discernment dies
When a girl clouds it with her lamp-black eyes."

He chastised his fellow poets for making much of the beloved's beauty:

"Her face is not the moon, nor are her eyes
Twin lotuses, nor are her arms pure gold:
She's flesh and bone. What lies the poets told!
Ah, but we love her, we believe the lies."

He explores the woman's body as if it were a landscape:
"If the forest of her hair
Calls you to explore the land,
And her breasts, those mountains fair,
Tempt that mountaineer, your hand—
Stop! before it is too late:
Love, the brigand, lies in wait."

Adultery was not frowned upon as a venal sin. Dharmakirti thus encourages a married girl to go to her illegitimate tryst:

"The road is rough; and, oh, the moon is bright
Suppose my husband should discover!
People may talk — But can I bear tonight

To disappoint my lover?
And so she walked a step or two, and then
Turned and came back again."

Amaru had similar message:
"Where are you going in the dead of night?
To meet my love who is life and death to me.
And are you not afraid to walk alone?
How can I be alone? Love keeps me company."

For sensuous conceit it is hard to match Sudraka:
"Thundercloud, I think you are wicked.
You know I'm going to meet my own lover,
And yet you first scare me with your thunder,
And now you're trying to caress me
With your rain-hands."

Amaru captured the agony of a lover separated from his sweatheart in this memorable verse:

"The lamps were lit and the night far spent,
And he, my love, was on love intent
And he knew full well just what loving meant:
But he made his love in a cautious way,
For the wretched bed upon which we lay
Creaked, and had far too much to say."

## The Language of Lust

As good as any definition of love that I have come across is "When spirit and body interanimate". John Donne was quite clear that the ultimate aim of every affair of the heart is the coupling of the bodies:

"Who ever loves, if he does not propose
The right true end of love, he's one that goes
to sea for nothing but to make him sick."

DeGourmont wrote in his *Natural Philosophy of Love,* "Given the two chief pieces of the apparatus, the sword and the scabbard, nature, as one might say, leaves it to the imagination of each species to decide the best manner of using them."

Poets and writers have viewed the woman's body in different ways and compared their endowments to a banquet to feast their eyes on, a landscape of sensuous hills and groves, as specimens of architectural voyeurism. In the *Song of Solomon,* in the Old Testament, the poet describes her "as fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as the army with banners," And goes on:

"Thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies
Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins."

The Old Testament has some exquisitely sensuous love poetry. An all-time favourite is the following from the *Song of Songs:*

"My beloved spoke, and said unto me
Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.
For, lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;
The fig tree putteth forth her green figs,
And the vines with the tender grape

Give a good smell.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away
O my dove, thou art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs,
Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice;
For sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.
Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines.
For our vineyards are in blossom.
My beloved is mine, and I am his:
He feedeth his flock among the lities.
Until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away,
Turn, my beloved...
By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth;
I sought him, but I found him not."

However censorious the church was about sex, many of the most godfearing and upright men of letters wrote about it in explicit detail. Milton justified it in the following lines:

"Whatever hypocrites austerely talk
Of purity, and place, and innocence,
Defaming as impure what God declares
Pure, and commands to some, leaves free to all.
Our Maker bids increase; who bids abstain
But our Destroyer, foe to God and Man?"

For sheer abandon to lascivious pleasure, there is nothing to match John Donne:

"Licence my roving hands, and let them go
Before, behind, between, above, below."

Then there was the American, Walt Whitman, who capture the ethereal quality of a perfect *maithun.*

"...love-flesh
Swelling and deliciously aching,
Limitless limped jets of love hot and enormous,
Quivering jelly of love, white-blow and delirious
juice,
Bridegroom night of love working surely and
softly into the prostrate dawn,
Undulating into the willing and yielding day,
Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweet
flesh'd day."

Understandably women writers were more reserved in their expression on intimacy. But Judith Wright had no feminine inhibitions:

"O move in me, my darling,
For now the sun must rise;
The sun that will draw open
The lids upon your eyes.
O wake in me, my darling.
The knife of day is bright
To cut the thread that binds you
Within the flesh of night."

— *Sunday,* December, 1997

# *Lover's Day*

Foreigners derive a lot of malicious pleasure reading matrimonial columns in our newspapers. It can't be denied that some insertions are very funny and mock our pretensions of marriages being made in heaven and our striving towards a casteless society. However if you wish to drive the same kind of malicious pleasure off the Europeans and Americans I recommend you glance through their newspaper of February the 14th of any year; it is Saint Valentine's Day dedicated to lovers. It marks the end of winter, and the beginning of courtship amongst birds and beasts. Not to be outdone white races use the event to declare their passions and put in not so-anonymous messages in newspapers. Even a staid, conservative paper like *The Times* of London devotes four pages to conveying human longings in print. It is not easy to decipher the identity of the parties because they employ secret language used by lovers between themselves and often the words used to express desire (it is more lust than love) have no meaning except to those who have used them while making love. Occasionally you may get a clue to a concealed

message, e.g., "To a cuddly pussy cat. Love Fuzzy Bear. Proverbs 1.10". Consult the Holy Book and you discover that the Proverbs are of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel. He advises his son: "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not." All one can gather is that Fuzzy Bear wishes his cuddly pussy cat to remain faithful to him.

Our Indian brethren living in England have been infected by the passion-bug. One Sri K.T. informs his loved one *"tum pyar se pyari ho, jaan hamari ho."* A *sriyut* who signs himself as Possadum tells Kumari Chappati: "How fortunate are you and I whose home is timelessness."

European lovers like to describe themselves and their loved ones in animal terms of which bear, ape, tiger, pig, wart hog, frog, rhino and hippo seems to be the most preferred with the bear being the easy winner. Females of the loved species are usually pussy cat, she-elephants, squirrels or ducks with the pussy cat topping the list. Quite often the sweetheart is compared to a delicacy: honeypot, honey bunch, pudding, plum pie or souffle. Since sex is more on their minds than gentle companionship there are plenty of unabashed allusions to lust, e.g., "my favourite pink cheeked sex pot … stronger, swifter and sweeter than cupid's arrow is the anaemic frog's bud up … Tired, trusted and medically approved. For express relief try once again … Darling, egregious, erotomanic with eternal love from your rockape … Nobody does it better … vivacious, avaricious, provocative, sexy. … Beauty's self she is when all her robes are gone … small black pussy required to console ageing Caucasian tom cat. … Old cockerel loves charming, cheeky, chucky, chick, poached eggs and all. … Massager come back, I knead you." And so on.

However, not all the Valentine Day messages are sex-oriented. Some are reasonably good prose or poetry, e.g., "Seeing you is like the sun, breaking through storm clouds" which is a lot better than the editor's choice: "My crystal, I caress you with velvet and gossamer. In the cold transparent twilight let us whisper our melodies and marry our mellifluous murmurings."

We in India have a sister's day (*Raksha Bandhan*) and a brothers' day (*Bhaiya Dooj*), it may be worth our while to also have a *pyaar divas* or *Youm-i-aashiq-mashooqan.*

— *Sunday,* May, 1983

# *Talking of Love*

An Indian friend posted in Canada who had read what I had written about love and lust in my columns, sent me an extract from Somerset Maugham's *The Summing Up*. Although I have read almost every novel and short story written by Maugham and rate him among the best story-tellers of all times, I do not hold him in much esteem as a stylist or a thinker. The extract sent to me though not couched in immortal prose, is certainly very lucid on the theme of love. I would have liked to reproduce the entire text but refrain from doing so lest I be accused by readers of cheating them and filling my column with quotations. So I will just give a gist of what Maugham has to say and add my comments to it.

But before I do that let me make it clear that we are not talking of love in the broadest sense to include love of God, king, country, parents, children, nature, music, literature, etc, but specifically of love between adult men and women. In this limited context, Maugham believes love means two things: sexual love and loving-kindness. This is not very original. Plato differentiated between love

which involved sex and heavenly love which did not. Maugham prefers to call it loving kindness rather than Platonic love.

"Love passes, love dies. The great tragedy of life is not that men perish, but that they cease to love. Not the least of the evils of life, and one for which there is small help, is that someone whom you love no longer loves you," writes Maugham. I go along with him all the way. I would add one qualifying explanation. When an erstwhile sweetheart ceases to love you, what causes pain is not so much the betrayal but the bruised ego. After a time the hurt goes and you are ready to fall in love again with someone else.

Maugham makes the sex urge the bedrock on which the edifice of love is raised. I go along with him in this as well. He writes: "However much people may resent the fact and however angrily deny it, there sorely can be no doubt that love depends on certain secretions of the sexual glands. In the immense majority these do not continue indefinitely to be excited by the same object, and with advancing years they atrophy. People are very hypocritical in this matter and will not face the truth. They so deceive themselves that they can accept it with complacency when their love dwindles into what they describe as solid and enduring affection. As if affection had anything to do with love! Affection is created by habit, community of interests, convenience, and the desire for companionship. It is a comfort rather than an exhuberation."

Love is a transitive verb, said some grammarian. It shifts its focus from one person to another. Tolstoy wrote that "to say that you can love one person all you life is just like

saying that one candle will continue burning as long as you live." Hence, the tragedies in marriages made till deaths do them part. Ellen Key in her *Works* wrote, "Love has been in perpetual strife with monogamy."

Maugham makes it clearer: "We are creatures of change ... we are not the same persons this year as last; nor are those we love. It is a happy chance if we, changing, continue to love a changed person. Mostly, different ourselves, we make a desperate pathetic effort to love in a different person the person we once loved. It is only when the power of love when it seizes us seems so mighty that we persuade ourselves that it will last for ever. When it subsides we are ashamed, and blame ourselves for our weakness, whereas we should accept out change of heart as a natural effect of our humanity."

Maugham dismisses loving-kindness as a kind of dancing: "One dances for pleasure of the rhythmic movement, and it is not necessary that one should go to bed with one's dancing partner."

Love, as Maugham understands it (and I concur), is what Balzac describes as "poetry of the senses". Platonic love is love from the neck up, cerebral and devoid of passion. Love is earthy and heart downwards to the groins. The poet Donné captured its essence in three lines:

*Whoever loves, if he does not propose*
*The right true end of love, his the one that goes,*
*To sea for nothing but to make him sick*
*Where there is no sex, there is no real love.*

* * *

# *Love is Dumb*

Two things differentiate humans from other creatures when it comes to love and mating. One, humans do not have mating seasons as animals, birds, and insects do. Humans can mate round the year, while other creatures have to wait for the right time of the year for their sexual desires to be roused and to become capable of being consummated.

Two, humans are the only species which can communicate through speech. Other creatures have to communicate their physical desires through courtship dances, emitting smells, and making mating calls. Their approach to members of the other sex is explicit; among humans it is subtle.

Though speech gives humans many advantages over animals, they find it very difficult to express their emotions — it takes a lot for a man or a woman to utter the three simple words, "I love you", to each other. We often envy animals and birds who do not have to say anything, but get on with the job.

Yet, aspects of our animal ancestry still manifest themselves in our behaviour patterns which are human variations of animal courtship rites — not spoken, but communicative of desire. This is speechless flirtation by gestures. The most prevalent and primitive is winking an eye.

Studies in human behaviour show traces of animal-like behaviour in the approach towards the other sex. The first move is to attract attention. The male may do so by turning out smartly dressed, puffing out his chest as he strides past a group of women with macho steps. A woman will do so by wearing a dress which accentuates her physical assets, and walking with a seductive, hip-swaying gait.

After the 'notice me' act is over, the next step is to convey a message of availability. This is achieved through what Dr Givens, a specialist on the subject, says is a "I am harmless" message. Charles Darwin called it "submissive displays". Such behaviour is common among monkeys.

Patterns of flirtation have been the subject of research of Dr Eibl-Eibesfeld of Germany's Max Planck Institute. He's been round the world, studying the approaches of couples towards each other, and taking photographs without their noticing him. He has tabulated five gestures of submission: placing hands with upturned palms on the knees or a table, shrugging shoulders, tilting the head, behaving like a child, and, finally, yielding to each other.

It has been noticed that men are more drawn towards women who are plain to look at but convey the impression of availability, than towards beautiful women who play difficult to get. Differences between men's and women's approaches towards each other are also traceable to their

animal past. It has less to do with love or romance and more with their biological functions.

For a man, it can be one act of copulation, at times repeated with different women; for a woman it may entail nine months of pregnancy, almost a year of breast-feeding, and perhaps another three or four years during which a child is more dependent on its mother than its father.

Consequently, while a man's approach to the woman he likes is casual and unburdened with future responsibilities, a woman, perforce, has to be more choosy in the choice of her mate. If she senses that the man of her choice may ditch her, she will feign withdrawal.

She expresses herself by being coy, coquettish, and difficult to get till her man is driven to frenzy and more willing to commit himself.

No words need be exchanged; gestures and behaviour are eloquent enough. Dogs, cats, donkeys, and deer behave in the same way. In short, though humans can put our emotions in words, we prefer to express ourselves the same way as our ape ancestors: by speechless conduct.

— *Sunday*, February, 1997

# *Celibacy, Chastity and Love*

I have always regarded abstinence from sex to be against the laws of nature, leading to mental tensions and aberrant behaviour. On the other hand, it is also possible that if sexual energy is channelised into other creative pursuits, it can act like a self-manufactured tonic. Examples I have in mind are Bapu Gandhi, Morarji Desai, Mother Teresa and religious orders which enjoin celibacy as well as chastity.

Gandhi and Desai took vows of celibacy after they had enjoyed sex for many years. Mother Teresa took her vows at the age of puberty and never regretted it. And see the demonic (I beg her pardon) energy which she has, which has enabled her to achieve what she has.

To the best of my knowledge, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism do not approve of celibacy. The three religions which have institutionalised it are Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity. Certain Hindu sects like the Brahma Kumaris — if you can describe it as a Hindu sect — also require their members, male and female, to abstain from sex. I have never questioned them on the subject.

The largest organised fraternity and sorority of celibates

is to be found in the Catholic Church. How do Catholic priests, monks and nuns explain their commitment to remain single and abjure sex? Quite a lot has been written on the subject.

The word 'celibate' is derived from the Latin *caelebs,* meaning 'alone'. However, living alone is one thing Catholic brothers or nuns, Buddhist *bhikhus,* Jain *sadhus* and Brahma Kumaris do not do. They live in monasteries, nunneries, or ashrams. While sublimating the sex urge they evolve a body language of love which may or may not have erotic overtones.

Susan Griffin, American poet, author and meditator, has this to say about expression of desire: "Erotic feeling brings one back to this state of innocence before culture teaches us to forget the knowledge of the body. To make love is to become like an infant again. We grope with our mouths towards the body of another being, whom we trust, who takes us in her arms. We rock together with this loved one. We move beyond speech. Our bodies move past all the controls we have learned. We cry out in ecstasy, in feeling. We are back in a natural world before culture tried to erase our experience of nature. In this world, to touch another is to express love; there is no idea apart from feeling and no feeling which does not ring through our bodies and our souls at once."

In patriarchal societies like ours a woman who takes a vow of celibacy is regarded as an oddity who, with luck, may see the error of her ways in good time:

'A strong woman is a woman in whose head
A voice is repeating. I told you so,

ugly, bad girl, bitch, hag, shrill, witch
ballbuster, nobody will ever love you back,
why aren't you feminine, why aren't
you soft, why aren't you quiet, why aren't you dead?'

—Marge Piercy

The most plausible case for choosing to remain celibate is by Hannah Ward. She says quite blatantly. "I am a nun because I enjoy being a nun." It is said that when a woman finds her body she finds her sexuality and her own way of expressing it.

Hannah Ward affirms, "It's been as a nun that I've found my body and thereby my sexuality." What that is, she does not spell out, but I presume it is in social service and love for humanity.

But why do celibates have to flaunt their celibacy by wearing outlandish garments? Catholic brothers wear long cassocks, nuns black or white dresses prescribed by the orders they belong to, Buddhist *bhikhus* and nuns wear saffron, Jain *sadhvis* wear loose white clothes, Brahma Kumaris wear white sarees and Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity wear white sarees with a blue border. Can't they pursue their vocations looking like everyone else?

I don't know the answer, but quote Hannah Ward in support of my argument: 'One of my Franciscan sisters, fully habited, was travelling by coach. In front of her were a mother with her young daughter, the latter fascinated by this rather odd-looking figure sitting behind her. After much peering between the seats, puzzled looks and loud whisperings, the embarrassed mother explained

that 'it was a 'nun'. The little girl, with curiosity still unsatisfied, peered once again between the seats and politely asked my sister, 'Excuse me, do you have breasts?'"

— *Sunday*, January, 1996

# *The Divine Lover*

In his usually provocative style Nirad C. Chaudhury denounced Indians who tailor their interpretations of Hinduism to fit Christian concepts of religion. "Thus one peddles out Vedanta to the intellectually debilitated, another Yoga to the physically degenerate, and a third Tantra to the erotomaniac who has not the courage of his lechery!" Chaudhury may be right. But how do we interpret as multi-faceted a deity as Krishna who is not only the central figure of Vedanta and Bhakti yoga, but is as well the paradigm of lovers? Before we get down to interpreting him we should know who Krishna was, what he did to become the most popular deity in the Hindu pantheon and the different cults that were generated in his name.

Krishna means "black" and occurs in the Veda without any divine attributes. In the *Chandogya Upanishad,* there is reference to Krishna, son of Devaki, who was a scholar. Then there is a *rishi* named Krishna; and a "loud yelling" *Vaksha* (demon) with the same name who lived along the banks of the Jamuna and was slain by Indra. There was also a Dravidian Krishna who ruled over 50,000 subjects

all known as Krishnas and all Brahmin-haters who were massacred along with their pregnant wives to destroy all possibility of their seed sprouting into more Krishnas. Since this Dravidian Krishna was also a protector of cows, Hindu scholars have conjectured that the name applied to a tribe of cow-worshippers who stoutly resisted the Aryan invasions. Thus we can conclude that Krishnas were a swarthy race deserving of the description *Shyam* (black) given to them by the blonde, blue-eyed, light-skinned Aryans. However the Krishna that most of us are familiar with is the Krishna of the *Mahabharat,* the *Bhagwat Purana* and the *Harivansa.* Although regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu, he is worshipped as the Supreme God in his own right. He goes by a variety of names: Balaji, Damodar, Dasarha, Parthasarthy, Ranchoda, Madangopala (passionate cowherd), Kanhaiya (lover of virgins), Kishorilal (beloved of virgins), Madhava, Mohan, Murali, Murari and Shyam. Needless to say, in the world of art and literature it is Krishna the beloved of Radha and the *gopis,* the flute player and frolic-lover that is the most popular figure.

In all climes and languages love is a many-splendoured phenomenon. But nowhere in the world did it arouse as much passion among scholars and sages as it did in ancient India. Treatises on the art of lovemaking like *Kamashastra* and *Kokshastra* were entirely devoted to erotica and techniques of achieving successful coition. Even when pronouncing on mystic or divine love, our ancients could not resist translating the longing of the human soul for union with god into desire for sexual fulfilment. When it came to love between mortals, they wasted little time in preliminaries like words of admiration or affection and got

down to the real business of making love. This is not surprising since Kama, the god of love, is often identified with the (*agni*) and his wife *Rati* with sexual desire. She is portrayed folding a mirror (*darpana*) to arouse darpa — wantonness.

In Krishna's multifarious affairs with Radha (who incidentally was his aunt) and the *gopis* we are taken through the entire gamut of emotions, divine as well as earthly, dealt with in minute detail. Songs and poems on the subject are in *Sringartas* — "horny." All the ten stages of love (*Surara-dasam*) beginning with delight at the first glance of the beloved to utter distraction are deleted. True to their habit of cataloguing everthing, our ancients began with *purva raga* (the birth of love) and went through *prema, priti* and *Maithuna jvara* (coition fever) to *Tuli* (oneness achieved by simultaneous orgasm).

We have Vatsalya describing the beauty of baby Krishna in slumber:

*His sleepy eyes,*
*black beneath their drooping lids,*
*Are like a pair of bees, each trapped at dusk*
*in the night-closing petals of a flower.*

*Geeta Govind* abounds with beautiful descriptions of woodlands around Vrindaban:

*Winds from sandalwood mountains*
*Blow now toward Himalayan peaks,*
*Longing to plunge in the snow*
*After weeks of writhing*
*In the hot bellies of ground snakes,*

*Melodious voices of cuckoos*
*Raise their joyful sound*
*When they spy the buds*
*On tips of smooth mango branches.*

And the dangers that lovers encounter on their way to their places of meeting:

*Clouds break*
*Arrows of water fall*
*Like the last blows*
*That end the world.*
*The night is thick*
*With lamp-black for the eyes.*
*What but you, O friend*
*Would keep so late a tryst?*
*The earth is a pool of mud*
*With dreaded snakes at large.*
*Darkness is everywhere,*
*Save where your feet*
*Flash with lightning.*

There are innumerable erotic scenes depicting group love as in Keshav Das:

*Once in the woods when Krishna did sport*
*With Radha, seeking pleasures sweet,*
*And shouts of joy did issue forth*
*As oft when lustful lovers meet*
*When she did take the active role*
*Her necklace studded with dark gems*
*Did wildly shake thus to and fro.*
*Says Keshava, as if it were the sun*

*Had taken Saturn on his lap*
*And joyfully him he had swayed*
*In swing of black silk — so did —*
*Those dark gems with each move she made.*

It is Keshav Das again who has this amusing account of Krishna "surprising" one of the *nayikas* feigning sleep:

*When she knew Shri Krishna to approach*
*She feigned sleep, softly he essayed*
*To wake her — she would not be woke:*
*Then venturing forth, his hand he placed*
*Upon her rising bosom, so*
*That she did titillated feel;*
*Emboldened thus his hand did go*
*Her Waist-band to untie, when she*
*Did start and rise, and knowing him close*
*Said, 'All day long, oh! boor ill-bred,*
*Your cows you tend and at night force*
*Yourself in another woman's bed!'*

— *Sunday*

# *The Many Faces of Krishna*

We see him first as an amoral cowherd who steals butter, tells fibs, flirts with village girls including other men's wives and has an adulterous liaison with his own aunt. He is also an intrepid warrior and slayer of demons.

Some centuries later the philanderer aspect fades into the background and is replaced by the image of the destroyer of evil, the preserver of life and an *avatar* of Vishnu. He finally emerges as the God of all gods, the Supreme ruler of the Universe. This is the theme of Friedhelm Hardy's *Viraha-Bhakti,* more specifically the transition that took place in the Krishna's image in Tamil Nadu and its reincarnation in the north in the *Bhagavad Purana.* As one would expect of a German scholar, he has left no manuscript, however obscure, unread and has taken over 600 pages to expound his thesis. Without doubt it is the most definitive work on the subject to appear on the subject.

"The religious history of India is marked by the conflict and the interaction of two major trends: to conceive of the absolute either in terms of a mystical state of being, or as a personal God. The difference is not one of origin, for

both trends have their roots in the Vedas," writes Dr Hardy. There is, however, very little of Krishna in the Vedas. The *Rig Veda* identifies him with Vishnu. He comes into his own in the epic period of the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavadgita* and somewhat larger than life in the *Puranas.* In the *Mahabharata* (but not in the *Gita*) he is portrayed as an earthly character. This aspect is spelled out in greater detail in the *Puranas.* In between we have him established as a historical character in the *Chandogya Upanishad.* It is more than likely that it is from the *Upanishad* that the *Puranas* got to know of him as the son of Devaki. It is in the *Bhagavadgita* that Krishna speaks of himself as Vasudev and becomes synonymous with Vishnu, Narayana, and Bhagavan and one who manifests himself *"Sambhavami Yuge Yuge* — one who came into being age after age." It is significant that in the *Gita* we find Krishna shorn of his amorous proclivities and become the object of *Bhakti Yoga,* an exercise involving full control over the mind to merge individual identity with the divine. Thereafter the worshipper becomes the centre of attention and Prahlad the paradigm of *Bhaktas.*

Krishna *Bhakti* obviously started at its place of nativity around Mathura on the banks of the river Yamuna. It was here that the legends of his dalliance with the *gopis* were born. These ladies were at times treated as an anonymous group, at others symbolised in the chief favourite, Radhika. Besides ecstatic dancing, sexual union and pangs of suffering on separation became the theme of folk song and music. The Krishna of Mathura showed little concern for protection of *dharma* and his *gopi bhaktins* showed less concern for their obligations to their parents or husbands and all the

*gyan* (knowledge) they acquired was carnal knowledge. It is not surprisng that it was this representation of Krishna that poets like Hala, Kalidasa and Shyamlika exploited to the full. In the *Mahabharata,* the *gopis* recede into the background but continue their amours in *Harivamsa,* with zest worthy of full-blooded rustic females. "With their bodies smeared with cowdung and mud, they ran after Krishna in great delight, as female elephants after the male, and had their fun... Other cowherd girls, eager for sexual pleasures, became thirsty when observing his face, and then drank it when during the night they had occasion to make love... The hair — done with a parting — of these cowherd women became dishevelled on account of their eagerness to make love, and spread delightfully over their breasts."

We are not quite sure when Krishna legends crossed the Vindhyas to establish themselves in Tamil Nadu, except that by the 7th century AD songs in his praise were being composed by Tamilian poets. Krishna became Mayon, Radhika became Pinnai, and Yamuna the river Tolunai. Two broad streams of early Tamilian religious literature on Krishna can be discerned: *Chaukam* and the *Prabandham* of the twelve Alvar saint-poets. The Tamilian counterpart of Prahlad, the perfect *bhakta* is the *Chanron* who is not an ascetic recluse but a *grihasthi* and a man of the world. The object of his devotion is *Murukan* who possesses both eternal youth and eternal beauty. Murukan's hill is the ideal setting for "the unrestrained bliss of making love in the mountain, on a bed of flowers in a grove of mountain-ebony, with passions not subsiding."

With Alvars the floodgates of erotico-religious passions are thrown open. "Mayon embraced me, clasped my breasts

and shoulders, and then abandoned me. I know of no place where I could go along... He embraced me so painfully hard that my breasts lost their firmness and my thin waist became even thinner; having penetrated me, the thief just abandoned me... The bee — the god with the bird — has sucked the honey out of me; my womanhood now resembles a flower left equally emptied... The wicked deed of our Kannan — to unite with me and then to abandon me — is more cruel than Kannan himself."

The *bhakta* merges himself with the *gopi* and pines for the Lord as a newly married bride pines for the return of her bridegroom. "Since my youth I have faithfully dedicated my growing breasts to the Lord of Dvaraka, and worshipped him constantly... See, I could not live if other men enjoyed my large breasts that grew while I meditated on Krishna; it would be like a jackal that roams in the forest stepping upon and sniffing with its nose at the oblations offered by Vedic sages."

The *gopi* turned *bhakta* describes the consummation with the Lord-lover. "He entered inside me and crushed me to pieces; he let my life escape, and enjoys seeing me dance in agony."

The Yamuna having run its course from Mathura to Tamil Nadu returns to its northern habitat enriched by its Tamilian experience. According to Dr Hardy, the *Bhagvat Purana* is the manifestation of the Krishna cult with Tamilian overtones. Its theme is of the *gopi's* suffering the anguish of separation and thus having completed the passionate religious experience, he writes *Viraha-Bhakti.*

— *Sunday*, 29 January, 1984

# *The Art of Love Making*

It could well be entitled 'Love-making as an Art' or 'Copulation as the Ultimate Aim of Love'. Or by as many other juxtapositions of love and lust as there are *asanas* in Hatha Yoga. You have to give the fertile Indian mind the infinite capacity of extracting the last drop of semen through phallic manipulation that every healthy male in every part of the world indulges in every other day, without thinking much about it or investing it with supra-mystical qualities. Prof. Agrawala takes the process many steps further; he delves into its folkloric origins, unfolds scriptural papyri, examines erotic sculptures and paintings on Hindu temples and on paper to explain this unique Indian obsession with the mundane but lightly pleasurable pastime of mating. Thus a simple four-letter activity is elongated into a leaned and esoteric thesis of several thousand sentences.

To start with, one must understand the subtle distinction between Mithuna and Maithuna. The insertion of the latter 'A' between the m and i makes a world of difference. Without the 'A' we have a static male, seated alongside an

equally frigid female. "Mithuna is a pair, a couple of male and female", explains the learned professor, whereas Maithuna is male-female copulation." Hence no sooner the 'A' is inserted into the slot, the two are energised into activity which attains sublime heights when body and mind become one. It is the sort of mystic experience Shelley described:

*'A mist was spread, the sickness of a deep*
*And speechless swoon of joy, as might befall*
*Two disunited spirits when they leap*
*In union from this earth's obscure and fading sleep.'*

Literature on sex has been produced in abundance in our country from pre-historic times. Origins of tantra are yet untraced but tantric practices were known and commented upon in Buddhist and Jain texts as well as in the Vedas and the Puranas. Long before Vatsayana's *Kamasutra* and the *Koksastra* we had sexologists pronouncing on all matters of sexual aberration. Why some came to be known as Vama (Left-handed) is not recorded, but modern-day psychiatrists have noted that Indian males only use the fingers of their left hand to excite female genitalia because they regard it as unclean and not to be touched by the hand they eat with.

In India, sex activity was understood in the first place as a religious act for a religious purpose, writes Prof. Agrawala. He quotes a passage from the *Chandogya Upanishad* which is typical of the obfuscation practised by our ancestors. This is the *Vamadevya chant* as woven upon copulation. He who knows this *'Vamadevya chant'* comes to copulation, procreates himself from copulation, reaches

a full length of life, lives long, becomes great in offspring and in cattle, great in fame. One should never abstain from *any woman.* That is the rule.'

To this day taking a woman to bed is commonly described by Hindiwallas as *bhog lagaana* — the same as an offering made to the gods. (Not many people realise that it was not English that gave the word 'fuck' to the world but our ancients: it is an anglicised distortion of *bhoga*). With the coating slapped on the all-too-brief act of sex it was not too long a step to plastering scenes of erotica on temples depicting gods and goddesses as well as mortals engaged in coitus and having women servitors (*devadasis*) made available to worshippers. Prof. Agrawala has cited many opinions explaining erotica in places of worship. Dr Coomaraswamy is right in holding that they are there "simply because voluptuous ecstacy has also its due place in life; and those who interpreted life were artists."

This book is not designed to teach you the art of making love but only to inform you of the fantasies that artists and men of letters have had about it. It gives you visions of *Uttarakurn,* the Hindu concept of paradise where there are *Mohanagrahas* (pleasure houses) with their *Suratbhavans* (chambers designed for sexual pleasure.) Here you may acquire powers of perpetual erection including the power to reabsorb semen discharged in the *Yoni* 'when it is wished that woman shall not conceive'.

— *Illustrated Weekly of India,* 4 March, 1984

# *Love*

It is indeed a many splendoured thing which casts its spell on every mortal of every age sometime or the other. It is not easy to define love. The closest we can get to it is to describe it as "the feeling that you feel you are going to feel a feeling that you never felt before." This does not sound very helpful. So we look at its earliest symptoms. Its first manifestation is wanting to be in the company of a particular person. Next, the desire to be in the company of that person turns to dependence on them: in their company there is happiness; without them a feeling of emptiness within. The dependant status inevitably reduces the seeker into a position of subservience.

People in love are eager to serve those they love because while love lasts, there is no one in the world like the beloved. Bernard Shaw tersely commented on this as "a gross exaggeration of the difference between one person and everybody else." People in love do not give a fig for their dignity nor to reactions of the society in which they live. Love demands a no-holds barred commitment to the other without calculating the risks involved. This is perhaps

what Bertrand Russell meant when he said, "Of all forms of caution, caution in love is perhaps the most fatal to true happiness."

Love can come upon a person uninvited and unsought. It can develop in the most unlikely relationships defying barriers of wealth, nationality, religion and differences of age. I am not sure if Marlowe was right when he asked: "Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight?" but he was closer to the truth in the opening lines of the same sonnet when he said:

*It lies not in our power to love, or hate,*
*For will in us is over-rul'd by fate.*

Why two people are drawn towards each other remains an enigma. "What did she find in him?" is the sort of question people will ask when they hear of an attractive young girl falling for a grey-beard the age of her father. She may not know the answer herself and will explain it away as seeking for a father-figure or somebody on whom she can off-load her emotional problems. But once the emotion of love has overtaken them, it drives all other considerations out of their minds and they can think of nothing besides each other. Like Browning, all the Latin they can construe is *'Amo'* — I love. At every postal delivery they await a love-letter; at every ring of the telephone they expect to hear the voice of their beloved. To wit Kathleen Raine:

*Waiting for the longed-for voice to speak*
*through the mute telephone, my body grew weak*
*with the well-known and mortal death, heartbreak.*

Love unexpressed can be like physical pain and is

particularly acute among the young. But worse agony than love undeclared is love spurned. It can be a torture. On the other hand, love returned in full measure can be pure ecstasy. Poets have written about both its agonies and its ecstasies providing lovers a vast choice of verse from which to express their feelings. For sheer explosion of delight on reunion with the beloved it is difficult to match Othello's welcoming speech to Desdemona:

*O my soul's joy!*
*If after every tempest come such calms,*
*May the winds blow till they have waken'd death!*
*And let the labouring bark climb hills of seas*
*Olympus-high, and duck again as low*
*As hell's from heaven! If it were now to die,*
*'T were now to be most happy; for I fear,*
*My soul hath her content so absolute,*
*That not another comfort like to this*
*Succeeds in unknown fate.*

Equally evocative are the last few lines of Matthew Arnold's Dove beach:

*Ah, love, let us be true*
*To one another! for the world which seems*
*To lie before us like a land of dreams*
*So various, so beautiful, so new,*
*Hath really neither joy, nor love nor light,*
*Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;*
*And we are here as on a darkling plain*
*Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,*
*Where ignorant armies clash by night.*

Persons in love become oblivious of everything and everyone around them except themselves. Hilaire Belloc's *Juliet* sums up the situation:

*How did the party go in Portman Square?*
*I cannot tell you; Juliet was not there.*
*And how did Lady Gaster's party go?*
*Juliet was next me and I do not know.*

It is a time when the lovers feel that all they ever wanted of life was each other and there is nothing more they have left to ask for from providence. Agha Hashr Kashmiri put in beautiful words:

*Sab kuch khuda sey maang liya, tujh ko maang kar.*
*Utthey nahin hain haath merey is dua ke baad*
(All I asked for from God was granted
When He granted you to me;
My hands have not risen in prayer
After this prayer was fulfilled.)

After God has granted the lover's prayer, the two feel as if they could sat through life overcoming all its hazards and setbacks:

*Mujhey sehel ho gaaen manzilen*
*Yeh havaa ke rukh badal gayey;*
*Tumhaara haath haath mein as gayaa*
*Ke Chirragh raah mein jal gayey*

When your hand I took in mine,
Lamps along my route turned bright:
Winds changed their course to ease my way
My goals appeared in easy sight.

An absolute rule of love is implicit faith in the beloved's words — even when suspicions come in mind they must be cast aside:

*When my love swears that she is made of truth,*
*I do believe her, though I know she lies.*

"The maddening thing about love is that one can never synchronise one's watches," writes July Cooper in *The British in Love.* She quotes Bernard Shaw: "The fickleness of the women I love is only equalled by the infernal constancy of the women who love me." It is the unevenness in lovers' relationships that causes suffering to the one who wants more out of the relationship than the other is willing to give. Joseph Mayne put it wittily when he described love as "a mutual admiration society consisting of two members. Of these, the one whose love is less intense will become president."

The only choice for the less loved is to involve themselves as much as they can in their beloved's pursuits. "The first thing to remember is to get interested in your man's work," Nathaniel Gubbins' character Mrs Miffins advises: "If it's pigs, get interested in pigs and if it's leaky taps and cisterns, get interested in leaky taps and cisterns."

As long as the relationship goes well, God's in His heaven and all's right with the world. The sweetheart's voice is "like music on the waters" — and the lover expresses his emotions with gay abandon as in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night.* He will:

*Write loyal cantons of contemned love,*
*And sing them loud, even in the dead of night;*
*Holla your name to the reverberate hills*

*And make the babbling gossip of the air*
*Cry out, "Olivia."*

In one of his sonnets, Edmund Spenser writes of the lover's preoccupation and his own conceit:

*One day I wrote her name upon the strand*
*But came the waves and washed it away*
*Again I wrote it with a second hand,*
*But came the tide and made my pains his prey.*
*Vain man, said she, that does in vain assay,*
*A mortal thing so to immortalize,*
*For I myself shall like to this decay.*
*And eke my name be wiped out likewise.*
*Not so, quoth I, let baser things devise*
*To die in dust, but you shall live by fame;*
*My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,*
*And in the heavens write your glorious name,*
*Where when as death, shall all the world subdue,*
*Our love shall live and later life renew.*

## Platonic love

The ultimate aim of love is complete mental and physical union "when spirit and body interanimate" Platonic love is for the impotent. Often a couple may start by swearing that their affection for each other would not involve sex. That lasts only as long as the man does not know that the gun he carries is loaded. Love, according to Balzac is "the poetry of the senses."

It is a combination of sex and sentiment. There is a French proverb to the effect that love is blind; that is why

it always proceeds by the sense of touch. It is, as Voltaire rightly called it, "of all the passions the strongest, for it attacks simultaneously the head, the heart and the senses." John Donne put it more bluntly:

*Whoever loves, if he does not propose*
*The right true end of love, he's one that goes*
*To sea for nothing but to make him sick.*

Hence Donne's pleading with his mistress:

*Licence my roving hands, and let them go*
*Behind, before, above, between, below.*

Being loved is altogether a more exuberant feeling than loving. It makes you feel omnipotent and on top of the world. One of P.G. Wodehouse's characters being assured of being so loved, "He felt devilish fit. He would have liked to run a mile or two and jump a few gates. He felt grand and strong and full of beans. What a tripping thing life was when you came to think of it."

One great delusion lovers suffer from is that their affection for each other will last all their lifetime. It is ironic that the oath "till death do us part" is taken at marriage — and it is marriage that in most cases destroys that delusion. With or without marriage separation over a period takes its toll and erstwhile lovers begin to cast around for solace elsewhere. "To say that you can love one person all your life is just like saying that one candle will continue burning as long as you live," wrote Tostoy.

Love can die many deaths. The least painful is when life slowly ebbs out of it and the lovers of yesterday become friends for the tomorrows to come. But abrupt

termination of the relationship by one party can generate hate of an intensity that passes comprehension. Colton was right in holding that "friendship often ends in love, but love in friendship never."

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If you are looking for answers to eternal questions like which came first – love or lust – or debates pertaining to celibacy, chastity or arranged marriages, Khushwant Singh delivers his expose on such intimate matters within the pages of this volume.

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The book abounds with Indian as well as foreign myths, legends, proverbs and poems ranging from Chaucer, Shakespeare, Whitman to Kalidasa, Iqbal and Faiz. There are delectable quotes from Russell to Wodehouse. And almost each page offers you special anecdotes, which could somehow come from Khushwant alone. Only he could share with you his intense experience of nudo-phobia suffered in Sweden, his acute observation of Indian whoremongers once they are abroad, scandals amongst the literati and glitterati – H G Wells as a compulsive fornicator or Georges Simenon hammering away at his typewriter (and his women) as a routine at the age of 80 are only a few revelations.

Then his carnal curiosity gives way to more serious notes. He talks about Beatrice Faust's analysis of the female approach to pornography, Shulamith Firestone's philosophy of women's liberation, Sudhir Kakar's exploration of Indian sexuality. Further, highlights such as Khushwant's well-researched etymology of love related lexicon has much to teach including facts like how something as banal as bran works as the ultimate aphrodisiac.

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